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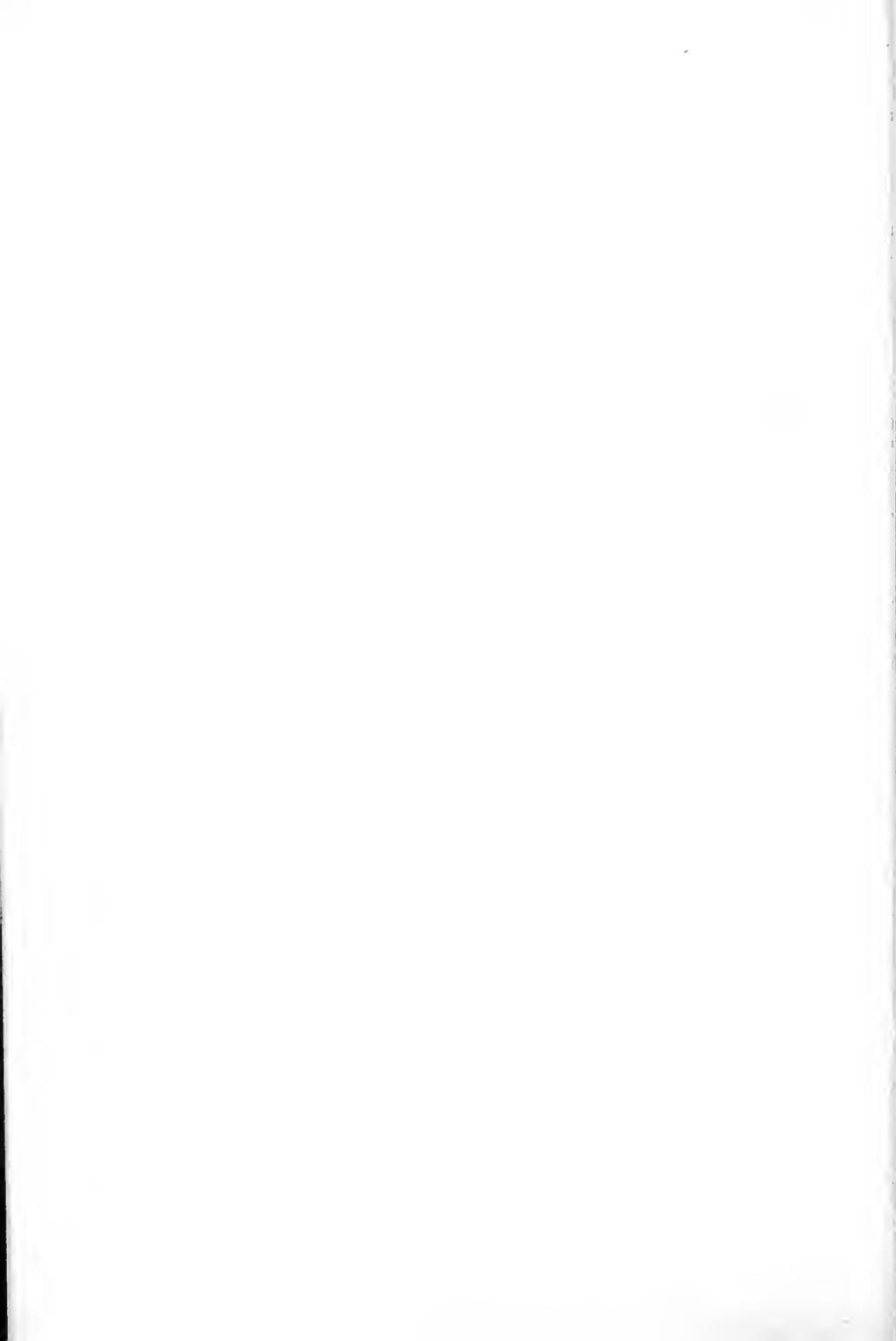
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THE ENCHANTED.

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*AN AUTHENTIC ACCOUNT OF
THE STRANGE ORIGIN OF
THE NEW PSYCHICAL CLUB.*

BY

JOHN BELL BOUTON

AUTHOR OF "ROUND THE BLOCK," "ROUNDABOUT TO
MOSCOW," ETC., ETC.

"My mind had become so completely possessed by the imaginary scenes and characters . . . , that I seemed to be actually living among them. . . . I could not but reflect on the singular gift of the poet; to be able to spread the magic of his mind over the very face of Nature; to give to things and places a charm and character not their own and to turn this 'working-day world' into a perfect fairy land. He is indeed *The True Enchanter*."—*Washington Irving*.

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TO THE MEMORY
OF
Irving, Hawthorne, Longfellow,
TRUE ENCHANTERS,
THIS BOOK IS REVERENTLY INSCRIBED.

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• THE ENCHANTED.

PROLOGUE.

UNCLE GUS'S GHOST AT THE HAILFELLOWS'.

MR. GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS SWANN—"Uncle Gus," he was always called—had been a member of the Hailfellows' Club, of New York, for twenty years, when he died. The cause of his death was marasmus, the doctors said, or an even wearing out all round. No one knew how old he was, but there were veterans of "the street" who remembered him as a banker and broker in Jauncey Court fifty years back. He had retired from business, before the speculative times of the war, with a fortune ample for his bachelor wants. Club-life was his passion. He had assisted in launching three or four clubs on the sea whose shores are strewn with wrecks, and all but one had foundered and gone to pieces amid the thunder and lightning of enraged creditors. The Hailfellows, of which he was an original incorporator, was the sole survivor of his ventures in that line. This club, like the rest, would have been engulfed, if Uncle Gus had not assumed its load of

debt to upholsterers, grocers, and coal dealers, and taken a chattel mortgage on the furniture and pictures, which was well understood to be an empty formality. This generous act and Uncle Gus's perpetual smile, old-fashioned courtliness, high-colored handsome face, tall, straight figure and jaunty dress, which beautifully blended the old and the new styles, straps and flowing neckcloths with rolling coat-collars and hip pockets, made him a universal favorite. As he sat regularly every afternoon in a great arm-chair, expressly reserved for him by common consent, at the bay window and looked out on the endless Fifth Avenue procession, with the keenest interest in the passing faces, many of which he knew, he was the best possible advertisement of the quiet, the comfort, the neatness, the respectability of the Hailfellow. At the Saturday night dinners, he invariably occupied a particular seat at the central table; faultless as to evening dress, with a rosebud and geranium leaf in button-hole and gold double eye-glasses dangling down his shirt front. As he ate sparingly and took only a few sips of a special brand of claret—labeled “Uncle Gus” in his honor—he found time to talk freely to the neighboring *convives*, and it was a point of honor with the youngest Hailfellow not to yawn over his reminiscences of Grisi, Mario, Fanny Ellsler, and old Wallack, and always to laugh at his jokes which

he never failed to repeat in the same familiar words, except that sometimes he wandered near the end and missed the point. Dinner over, Uncle Gus would smoke a small mild cigar and then drop his venerable snow-clad head on his breast and sleep for half an hour undisturbed by the speeches that raged round him.

Uncle Gus took all his other meals at a corner table, at which no one else presumed to seat himself except on the invitation of its honored monopolist. Over this table hung a half-length portrait of the dear old man, purchased by subscription. It represented him not a whit pinker than the living original, with perhaps a flattery of hair over the temples, the mouth curving at the ends in a truthful smile, the eyes bright and friendly, the head canted a trifle on one side, the forefinger of the right hand inserted between the third and fourth buttons of the vest. Having sat expressly for this speaking likeness, it was but natural that Uncle Gus should always uphold its fidelity by his pose and manner. It was noticed that he never stood erect in the club without inclining his head markedly on one side, and exploring the interior of his vest with his right hand, while his winning smile became even more expansive as years rolled on.

At precisely nine o'clock every night Uncle Gus

would go down-stairs to the billiard-room and sit in a high chair, where he could watch the boys playing. In his day he had been a fine shot ; but his hands had become shaky and he could no longer grip the cue. But from his throne he overlooked match games with the deepest interest, acting as umpire when asked. At the expiration of an hour he would ascend slowly to the second floor where he would play just one rubber of whist, in which game he was really formidable when he had five trumps (including two honors) and one strong suit. At twelve o'clock Uncle Gus always bade the company a collective and dignified good-night and sought his own elegant bachelor quarters, about three blocks distant from the club house, usually with some young Hailfellow hooked to his arm as escort.

Uncle Gus's perennial courtesy came out strongly on Ladies' Day. Then he reinforced the reception committee of young men and surpassed them all in his gallant deferential attitude to the fair guests. It was delightful to see him totter around, sometimes offering his arm with mediæval stateliness to an old lady and escorting her to a seat, then picking up the fan she dropped (perhaps intentionally), then slowly straightening himself as if fearing a crick in the back, and then bustling about to get an ice and some cake and lemonade for her. He took

pleasure as he used to say, in "sailing in and cutting out" the younger ladies from the escort of the rakish juvenile committeemen.

It was on a Ladies' Day that he caught, in a draughty stairway, the cold that deprived the Hailfellow of their most useful and ornamental member.

By Uncle Gus's will the club received as bequests the (canceled) mortgage on its furniture and paintings, a monster punch bowl of Wedgwood (authentic beyond doubt), twelve standard treatises on whist uniformly bound in tree-calf and richly annotated by his own hand, and a small fund for keeping the billiard table in repair.

The club attended his funeral in a body, draped his portrait in crape, and passed three resolutions of regret with a preamble, which were published in the leading papers at regular advertising rates. All of which would seem to indicate that Uncle Gus's connection with the Hailfellow had been permanently dissolved, and that his genial presence would gladden them never more. But not so.

One night, about thirty days after the burial of Uncle Gus, there was a spirited match game of billiards at the club. Quayle and Offling, the two crack players, were the contestants. The struggle ceased just before midnight, with Offling as victor, and the spectators filed off one by one into the

darkness. The champion and the vanquished lingered behind to discuss somewhat heatedly the merits of a particular stroke which had been decisive in the last round. They were left alone, when Quayle, in a spirit of bravado, challenged Offling to one more trial of their skill. The banter was accepted, and both men threw off their coats and began. At ten minutes past twelve Quayle was about to attempt an exceedingly difficult shot, when the cue fell from his hands and he started back with eye-balls protruding and every sign of fright and amazement in his visage.

“ Wh—what’s that ? ” he cried, pointing with trembling forefinger to the high chair, which he had been facing.

“ What’s what ? ” exclaimed Offling, looking in the same direction.

Quayle continued to gaze fixedly at the chair a full minute, then passed his hand over his brow, and replied in a still agitated voice :

“ N—nothing now—but I would swear Uncle Gus was sitting there a moment ago.”

“ You’ve been playing too long and your nerves are unstrung. You’d better go home and to bed.”

Quayle energetically protested that he had plainly seen Uncle Gus, in his customary seat, leaning forward and looking earnestly at the shot about to be made. Offling laughed heartily at

every word of the statement and then renewed his advice with the additional suggestion of a dose of bromide just before retiring.

The interrupted game was not renewed, and the rival players sauntered off, arm-in-arm, discussing the alleged occurrence with gravity on one side and jocosity on the other. If the kind-hearted Offling had not really been alarmed at the upset condition of Quayle, he would have hunted through the club for stray members to whom he could tell the story with the comic exaggeration in which he excelled. But he was anxious to see his perturbed friend safely home and he postponed his amusement till the morrow. Next night all the frequenters of the club were regaled by Offling with the full particulars of Uncle Gus's apparition, including a capital imitation of Quayle's fright and astonishment. And when the latter dropped in, later than was his wont, and noticeably pale as if from lack of sleep, he was obliged to run a gauntlet of questions and jokes. To all these he replied, with forced composure, that he had certainly seen Uncle Gus in his favorite high chair. They might say his liver or his head was out of order the night before. He did not ask anybody to believe him. He knew the absurdity of claiming to see a ghost nowadays. But he would not deny what was a solemn fact. He stood by his story against any amount of ridi-

cule, and much more of the same sort. Of course, none of his hearers believed in the genuineness of the *revenant*. The only point at issue was whether Quayle was the victim of a momentary aberration or whether he had deliberately invented the specter. Whatever the truth might have been, the incident was a nine days' wonder among the Hail-fellows and then was forgotten, till revived by a strange event a few weeks afterward, as follows:

It was between midnight and one o'clock when four of the best whist players of the club were engrossed in a game in the snug little card room upstairs. They were surrounded by lookers-on who had finished their play at the other tables. A fresh deal had thrown into the hands of one of the four a combination which would have rejoiced the heart of Uncle Gus. There were six trumps (three of them honors) and a suit of five from ace to ten spot. When Uncle Gus got the lead with something like this to back him, he was in the seventh heaven of happiness. If, with the assistance of his partner, he could, as sometimes happened, capture every trick, he would never brag of his consummate skill. He would only smile sweetly and receive with becoming modesty the congratulations upon his masterly play, which it would have been sheer brutality to withhold.

Puffer was the fortunate custodian of that hand

that night. The lead had come to him and he was on the point of swinging out with the king of trumps when Boost, at his left, cried, "Good Heavens!" and let his fan of cards fall to the floor. At the same moment Treeford, who stood among the spectators, uttered a guttural sound as of horror and clung to the person nearest him. Both men were gazing in a stricken, helpless manner at the space behind Puffer's chair, the identical arm-chair, roomy and softly-cushioned, which for many years had been taken nightly by Uncle Gus.

"What's the row now?" "What's up?" "Another ghost?" "Give us a rest!" were some of the ejaculations of the little group. Whereupon Boost and Treeford gravely averred that they had seen Uncle Gus in the rear of Puffer, leaning over him and placidly smiling at his cards.

Questioned by some earnestly and by others facetiously, they agreed in the most trivial items as to the appearance of the phantom, and these again harmonized with Quayle's story. Even down to the rose-bud and geranium leaf which decorated the lapel of the dress coat he wore on both occasions—and *in which he had been buried.*

The game thus interrupted was not renewed, all interest being absorbed by the startling incident of the night, with the sole exception that Puffer wanted to play out his extraordinary hand. The

fact that two new men claimed to have seen Uncle Gus, and by their emphatic words and still more their looks sustained that statement, lessened somewhat the volume of jeers with which Quayle's tale had been received. Several persons present inclined to regard the matter seriously. They said, "Well, after all, who knows?" and "Why not?" and two at the same instant repeated what *Hamlet* remarked to his incredulous friends about his father's ghost. This reminded some one to emphasize the coincidence that the specter, or whatever it was, had been seen so far only by Uncle Gus's special intimates, as was proper and to be expected. Somebody else pointed to the circumstance that the hour (past midnight) was favorable to ghostly manifestations. For these reasons the ghost theory, as against the supposition of a practical joke, or disordered livers or heads, gained several adherents in the card room that night.

On a certain Saturday night, a few weeks after this occurrence, the regular club dinner had been protracted to a late hour by speeches, stories, and songs. The bright, warm room was so cheerful by contrast with the cold rain pattering against the windows, that the feasters were loth to quit the table and go home. Nearly every one had been toasted and had contributed his mite to the entertainment. Then began a series of impromptu

healths to absentees, which were responded to by their friends present in a humorous strain of compliment to the missing ones. While the merriment was at its height, a young man of a sentimental aspect rose and gave a preparatory "ahem!" All turned to him, and when they observed the gravity of his face they knew that Fullkirk was about to say something in earnest, as was his custom. It was because of his earnestness, which afforded relief from the habitual frolicsome mood of the Hail-fellows, that he was always heard with strict attention—especially as his remarks were never long. He raised a glass and said in a voice tremulous with emotion, "Gentlemen, let us drink in silence to the memory of Uncle Gus." There was a dead hush as all rose and lifted glasses to lips. Only a few smiled at the thought—which all had in mind—that Uncle Gus might improve the opportunity to reappear to those privileged beings who had eyes to see him. As glasses were drained, there was a general expectation that something startling would occur—and it did. Five glasses simultaneously shivered on the table or floor as they dropped from uplifted hands, and from different parts of the room were heard cries of "There he is!" "No mistake this time!" "It's Uncle Gus, sure!" and the like, and five men pointed at the chair which had always been reserved for the departed Swann at the oval in the center.

Before the general company could do more than glance at the chair, which was then tenanted by a stout, red-faced man, looking as little like a ghost as possible, the faces of the five became chap-fallen and blank. Nobody needed to be told that whatever they had seen had disappeared. Then followed a cross-fire of raillery and questioning which they met as best they could. In their stories there was perfect harmony. They had all seen Uncle Gus, erect behind that chair, wearing the historic dress suit, boutonnière, and smile. His head was slightly bent forward as if in acknowledgment of the compliment paid him. One hand was raised as if to make a gesture of modest deprecation. From this statement the five—who included the grave Fullkirk—could not be shaken. If it was a “put up job,” as the skeptical ones continued to insist, the scheme was a masterpiece of concerted action.

The ghost theory made new converts, especially when it was remarked that the clock had struck twelve just previous to the alleged appearance of Uncle Gus, and also that the five who claimed to have seen him were his oldest and dearest friends, and therefore, according to ghost lore, most likely to be favored with the spectacle. It is true that these comprised the three who had previously beheld him in the spirit—thus making the number of witnesses small relative to the whole club member-

ship. As the case stood, the five were, by a considerable majority, believed to have played a good joke in a manner reflecting great credit on their ability as liars and amateur actors.

Those members who still clung to the supernatural theory commented on what they called a "singular coincidence," serving to explain why Uncle Gus never again visited the Hailfellows. At a date soon after that memorable dinner the club proceeded to carry out a plan of altering the house, which he had always opposed. This consisted of moving the card room from the second to the third floor, where more space could be provided for the players, by abolishing a partition and throwing two rooms together. The estimated cost was small and Uncle Gus's sole objection to it was that he did not want to climb two flights of stairs. If one may grant the survival of earthly passions and prejudices beyond the grave, it might follow that in another, even though a better, world, this lamented uncle would continue to be so sensitive on the subject as to cut the club which had taken advantage of his death to disregard his wishes. Though (and this was a strong point on the other side) it really would not seem to matter much to a ghost, whether the card room was promoted one flight or not, since Uncle Gus no longer required legs to take him up-stairs and could not sit down and play when he got there.

In these discussions there were two members, in good and regular standing, who took no part. They were Messrs. Meldrum and Wadlow. The attitude they held was that of agnostics; they neither affirmed nor denied. They waited for more light, which never came. It never does come. But though they reached no satisfactory conclusion about this particular ghost, they struck a trail which led, by devious windings, to the remarkable results set forth in the pages following.

Investigating the old theory of projected mental images as explanatory of specters, they found that, with their eyes tight shut and an intense concentration of memory and will, they could see any quantity of ghosts. They could call up shades of Uncle Gus and other dead people, and living ones too—these being pictured on the inside of the lids, as it seemed to the startled experimenters. But the forms were all faint and transitory, like celestial nebulae, whose outlines can be traced for a moment only and then become confused and vanish.

When Meldrum tried what he could do with his favorite heroes and heroines of fiction, his success was amazing, and Wadlow's no less so. Jeanie Deans, Edgar of Ravenswood, Colonel Newcome, Becky Sharp, Pickwick, Little Nell, Romola, Dorothea, Jane Eyre, Donatello, Uncas, Rip Van Winkle, and others, whose mimic lives had passed into their own

through the wonderful medium of the printed page, could be plainly seen in figure, face, and dress against the fleshly curtain, and did not disappear till the eyeballs became heated and pained with the strain of holding them to the work.

Seeking to explain why these fictitious ideals were so much more distinct to the inward vision than the real men and women they had known, the two friends concluded that the former had been *stamped on their minds in deeper lines and stronger colors by the genius that had created them.* Uncle Toby was more of a reality than Uncle Gus. No lady of their acquaintance was half as sharply defined as Olivia Primrose. How much they owed to pictures, statues, plays as accessories they could not determine. But the cardinal fact of the superior distinctness of all these purely fanciful characters they attributed to the wonder-working genius that lay behind them, and to which painter, sculptor, actor, were only supernumerary.

Having gone so far in a new line of psychical research, it needed but another step to take Meldrum and Wadlow into an enchanted realm where they were the first to set foot.

This book records some of their surprising adventures prior to the organization of the New Psychical Club, which will prosecute the same interesting class of experiments in a wider field, with such a variety

of earnest minds at work as will, it may be hoped, develop all the possibilities of the new science. Those fully qualified for enrollment among THE ENCHANTED may prove to be few. Still fewer may be the TRUE ENCHANTERS themselves. It is not within the sovereign power of many authors of all the past to link their inspirations to places so that these will be inseparably connected for ages to come, as Sleepy Hollow will be identified with Ichabod Crane and Alloway Kirk with Tam O'Shanter.

What the passing generation of bards and novelists can do toward supplying THE ENCHANTED with their ethereal food it remains for future generations of their readers to find out. The adjustment of their claims to rank now among TRUE ENCHANTERS does not come within the present writer's province. Time tries all.

CHAPTER I.

MELDRUM AND WADLOW, OF NEW YORK, MAKE A DISCOVERY AND ARE DISCREDITED.

IN the autumn of 1888, Mr. Felix Meldrum and his friendliest of friends, Mr. Madison Wadlow, made a little sentimental journey in picturesque Westchester County, New York. A holiday had released them from the monotonous grind of business in the city. They profited by the respite to gratify a long cherished wish to visit Poe's cottage at Fordham. Its occupant courteously permitted them to inspect every nook and corner of the humble dwelling. They sat in the poet's favorite arm-chair. They rested their elbows in contemplative posture on the small, square deal table at which he had written some of his most admired poems and stories. They looked out of window at the back of the house upon a brown landscape from which that powerful and unique genius might have drawn his gloomiest inspirations. This conventional homage having been duly paid by the two friends to the memory of Poe, they left the cottage with a sense of satisfaction tempered only by the

regret that they had identified nothing in its interior with the well remembered effusions of his wonderful pen.

Then they resumed their standard gait of four miles an hour along a hilly and dusty road. An impulse—which may be indulged with safety in any rural environ of New York—to quit the highway and take to the fields and woods, suddenly seized the pedestrians. They jumped over a broken stone wall and struck a cow path. This led through a large meadow, full of golden-rod and late asters, to a thick clump of trees which masked the further view. As they followed the narrow, well-worn track, they heedlessly beheaded the flowers with quick strokes of their walking sticks and recited such snatches of Poe's verses as occurred to them.

"He [meaning the author of the *Raven*] must often have rambled over these grounds so near his house," said Meldrum. "What if we should light on some scene he has described."

"That would be a godsend," responded his equally sentimental friend. "But you know Poe's realm was the supernatural. He looked for his cues and hints within, not without."

"True; but no poet is so continuously introspective as to be wholly free from the influence of Nature. In her somber or her joyous aspects, she insensibly ministers to him."

"Here, if anywhere, we may test your dictum," said Wadlow, laughing, "for, if I mistake not, yonder is a scene that would have fed Poe's melancholy at the source." He pointed to a little vale into which they could peep between the thick columnar trunks of the trees ahead. It was sunless, though the sky above was bright. An odor, as of stagnant water and rotting vegetation, saluted the friends as they quickened their steps. In a few moments they stood on the edge of a cup-like formation of land and gazed downward in silence.

It was a depressing spectacle of Nature and Art in abandonment. In the near foreground was a large blackish pool, full of decaying autumn leaves. Beyond, vanishing in a long perspective of parallel lines, were tall old trees, from which the foliage had been mostly stripped by the high winds. On the ground lay giant trunks of their dead brethren. In a cleared space, so contracted that the afternoon sun could not reach it over the tops of the adjoining somber pines, stood a large house, dilapidated and seemingly tenantless. Its great age was apparent in the sunken condition of the roof, which looked as if ready to collapse with its own weight. The windows were broken, the chimneys toppling. The wood-work had lost its original paint, if it ever had any, and was of a dingy hue,

freely streaked with patches of vegetable mold. The only sign of life on the premises was a gaunt black cat which came out of a little jungle of weeds near the house, and when it saw the intruders darted into the woods like a wild thing. A kitchen garden, filled with towering stalks of the sunflower and tall dead grass were appropriate components of the unpleasing prospect. The friends looked upon the dismal scene without a word, till the same thought flashed upon both of them simultaneously.

"What is that but the dank tarn of Auber?" exclaimed Meldrum, pointing to the stagnant pool beneath them.

"And to match it, there is the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir," shouted Wadlow with ecstasy.

"Ulalume may have been written on this very spot. The feeling and tone of the place and the poem are the same," rejoined Meldrum.

"Bear in mind that this is October

Lonesome October

When the skies were ashen and sober, and the leaves
were withering and sere,

the very month rhyming with Auber, you remember," said Wadlow, with awe in his voice.

"An extraordinary coincidence, indeed," replied Meldrum, who fully shared the emotion of his companion.

Speechlessness seemed the proper tribute due to a spot hallowed by such unmistakable associations with one of the saddest and sweetest of poems. But it was broken a moment later by another astounding discovery.

“That—is—the—original—of—the—house—of—Usher,” whispered Meldrum, pale with the excitement of the startling idea.

“Plainly so,” rejoined Wadlow. “Its tottering condition would suggest its impending fall to anybody.”

The two friends had been so long accustomed to one another’s ways of thinking, that they harmonized spontaneously upon a question that then arose.

“I do not care to go any nearer,” said Meldrum; “it might spoil the picture.”

“Yes, the general view is much the best for storage in the memory. I always want to think that I have seen, with my own eyes, the dank tarn of Auber and the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir, and the house of Usher before its fall. The thought will enrich my whole life.”

“Let us drink in the scene for perhaps the last time,” added Meldrum solemnly.

Their eyes fondly lingered on every detail of the dreary landscape, and then they turned their backs upon it, happy in an achievement of the highest

import to a pair of Poe-worshippers like themselves, but of no particular interest to the world in general.

In fact, Meldrum and Wadlow were either listened to with amused incredulity, or else were mercilessly chaffed by the Hailfellows and in society whenever they vainly sought—even from the ardent admirers of *Ulalume*—any sympathy in their own pardonable enthusiasm over this discovery. They found out that, as a rule, one is not paid, but must himself pay handsomely, for the origination and acceptance of any idea which may, perchance, reflect some credit on himself. To do even so little a thing as to localize one or two of Poe's wild imaginings, instead of being taken as a service, humble but real, to literature, was construed as an impertinence, if not an offense.

There was a run on libraries for Poe's life and works in order to ascertain facts and dates that might go to invalidate the modest claims of Meldrum and Wadlow.

Great was the glee of one of these envious mousers when he showed, from a biography of Poe, that his "*Fall of the House of Usher*" was published previous to 1841, and that he did not take up his residence in Fordham till 1846.

Another skeptic was so anxious to deprive the two gentlemen of any honor they might possi-

bly reap from their researches in Westchester, that he investigated the matter on the spot for himself, and he reported with face and voice exhibiting the deepest and truest happiness, that the "dank tarn of Auber" was dug out as a private fish pond some years *after* Poe wrote his poem of Ulalume. Furthermore, that the old house near Fordham (the existence of which, in a tumble-down state, was admitted by the inquirer) was, in the year 1841 and for many years antecedent, the well-cared-for, beautiful and happy home of a large family, and that even if Poe had seen it long previous to his occupancy of the Fordham cottage, it could then have given him no clew to his conception of the deserted, haunted, and doom-laden House of Usher.

The bare assertion of these glaring anachronisms was received with almost universal approbation. The suppression of Meldrum and Wadlow was something so very much desired by their most intimate acquaintance that the statements we have cited, some of them unsupported by reference to chapter and verse or by any other testimony whatever, were regarded as final and overwhelming.

The gentlemen who were thus discredited were foolish enough, at first, to make a stand in behalf of their contention. Admitting, for argument's sake, that the facts were as represented by their opponents, there yet remained to be explained away

that extremely gloomy and repelling grove of trees which might justly have been the original of the "ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir." But they were promptly convinced that only an unconditional surrender of the theory, entire, would satisfy the demands of the literalists. And they gave it up.

It would be untrue to say that the doubts raised by these discussions had not influenced the minds of Meldrum and Wadlow; but if they confessed that they had been harboring any illusion, they did not wish it dispelled. They preferred, if need be, to shut their eyes tight and remain under the dominion of the enchanter whose genius had lent, for them if for nobody else, an irresistible charm to a spot otherwise but commonplace in its desolation, whenever it was recalled to memory as a blessed relief from the painful stress of the working-day world.

CHAPTER II.

THEY YIELD TO IRVING THE ENCHANTER, AND RE-
PRODUCE A "FÊTE CHAMPÊTRE" OF THE
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

THE stir and clamor of an elevated railway station in New York are emphatically unfavorable to mental abstraction. But in spite of these manifest drawbacks it was in just such a focus of noise and excitement that Meldrum and Wadlow, a few weeks after the adventure already narrated, made an experiment, the success of which depended on complete intellectual isolation from all disturbances. The making of this experiment—the fortunate result of which was destined thenceforth to contribute so freely to the innocent pleasure of the two friends—was not the formal submission of a slowly ripening theory to a test, but the merest of accidents. They had scaled the heights of the station at Battery Place, only to see the wicket slammed in their faces and the train which they had hurried to catch rolling northward. To kill a few minutes' time they leaned over the platform balustrade and looked idly down on the open space which was once

the only pleasure ground of New York, now cut up and spoiled by that quintessence of ugliness, an elevated railway of iron, whose rude and reckless architecture torments the eye, while the snorts and the sulphurous stenches of its locomotives affront the ear and nose intolerably. What was once the favorite resort of Fashion and Beauty is now given over to immigrants, whose right to enjoy the afternoon sea-breeze and what little remains of the old trees and verdure no one disputes. But one may be willing to leave them unmolested in their possession of the Battery, and still regret the absence of so much that used to give brightness and gayety to the lovely promenade ground of Irving's day.

It was their keen recollection of the Battery of the seventeenth century as Irving describes it—contrasting that charming pen-picture with the scrap of barren landscape before their eyes—that put Meldrum and Wadlow on the definite track of a new idea.

To recall Irving and dwell fondly upon him, almost of necessity brings back to the mind of those who thoroughly know the writings of that first and best of American humorists, his freshest and most amusing book—“Knickerbocker's History of New York.” The two friends knew it by heart, and could not have appreciated its geniality and unctuousness more thoroughly had they been scions

of the oldest and purest Manhattan stock instead of lineal descendants of those Yankees whom Irving satirized as the smileless and grasping neighbors and rivals of his jolly and confiding Dutchmen.

Fixing their eyes meditatively on a little patch of withered grass which still lingered to tell of what the Battery was in its ancient prime of greenness, the same scene out of the glowing pages of Geoffrey Crayon came unbidden to their brains. It was that of the Saturday afternoon revels held on the Battery in the good old days of Peter Stuyvesant, Governor of New Amsterdam.

Meldrum and Wadlow had often spoken to one another of the graphic and racy descriptions of those gatherings as, on the whole, the most ludicrous and vivid ever penned by the enchanter of Sunnyside.

"Can't we conjure it out of the void?" asked Meldrum.

"We can try," was Wadlow's response. He knew without a word of explanation of what his friend was thinking, so conversant was he with his literary tastes and his habits of mental association.

"Call that the green lawn where the burghers and vrows, the young men and maidens, assembled by the golden light of the afternoon sun for their weekly dance and frolic." Meldrum was looking hard at a burnt grassy space, barely large enough

to accommodate two quadrilles of our day, still less the extended mazes of the dance in which all the able-bodied subjects of Peter Stuyvesant took a leg together.

“Take down those miserable posts and chains; turf over those black, crumbling concrete walks; restore some of the mighty spreading trees that have been felled by modern vandals. First, bring back the scene and then perhaps we can summon up the actors,” said Wadlow.

The other nodded and both bent their minds to the pleasing task.

“That will hold them all, I should say,” and Meldrum outlined roughly with his cane, the area which he would rescue from its baser uses, and devote to the forthcoming festivities.

“That’s about what I myself had set apart,” said his friend. “Let us each take our time and call out when he sees anything worth mentioning.”

Two or three minutes elapsed before the ineffaceable pictures which each carried in the recesses of his head could be successfully projected upon the ground beneath them, like the images of a magic lantern upon a canvas. Both breathed hard and both turned pale under a mental strain as they labored at the concentration of thought indispensable for the purpose.

Meldrum was the first to break the truce of

silence, which he did with marked tremor in his voice.

"I've got the crowd all right. About a thousand people I should say. The women—"

Wadlow snatched the words from his lips—"The women with hair pomatumed back from their foreheads, and covered with smart little calico caps."

"Exactly," interrupted Meldrum. "Their petticoats catch my eye. They are so gay and—short."

"Luckily so, or we should not be treated to a sight of those long blue worsted stockings with magnificent red clocks, and trim ankles and shapely feet set off with silver-buckled shoes. Delightful to get back to those good old fashions, isn't it?"

"Yes, indeed. But we can't say as much for the men's costumes. Think of putting on six pairs of breeches every morning. Some of the dashing young fellows down there have ten, Knickerbocker tells us."

"The fun is about to begin. There's the dear old Governor himself. I should know him anywhere by his wooden leg, inlaid with silver, and his brimstone-colored trunks."

"In his right hand he carries a gold-headed cane and his left rests upon the hilt of his trusty sword. Do you observe who is speaking to him as he takes the chair of state under that great elm?"

“Who else but our old friend Antony Van Corlear, master of ceremonies, with his trumpet, his long red nose, his huge whiskers, and his invincible ways with women. Even now, as he whispers to the Governor, he is winking at a pretty girl over his excellency’s right shoulder.”

“It is a long distance to see a wink, but I think I caught it, too.”

“See, the lusty bachelor raises his trumpet to his lips and gives a blast, which I am not sorry we can’t hear. It is the signal for dancing. Those two darkies on the Governor’s left supply the music.”

“How quickly the young people respond. In a moment they have filled all the space left them by the worthy burghers, who sit around them in a great circle, placidly smoking their big Dutch pipes, while their vrows knit and sew and gossip and look on.”

The friends watched the rapid progress of the dance with much interest, occasionally exchanging comments on the conspicuous gallantries of that desperate rogue, Antony the Trumpeter, whose only compensation as director of entertainments was the right of kissing all the good-looking women, married or single. Those who danced the longest, tiring out all their competitors, were specially rewarded, if not ill-favored, with a hearty

smack administered by the great Petrus himself in his executive, semi-paternal capacity.

“It was something to be a governor in those days,” remarked Meldrum, as the first dance was concluded and a number of buxom, rosy-cheeked damsels stepped forward to receive the official reward.

“But better to be a trumpeter,” rejoined his comrade. “Observe the muck that rascal Anthony is now running among the petticoats, the fair owners of which always make a dumb show of struggling with him, but finally surrender to their fate and retire, laughing, to repair their damaged headgear and neckkerchiefs.”

There was a pause, during which the two old negroes who stood near the Governor’s chair screwed up their fiddles, holding them fondly to their ears, snapped the strings with their fingers, drew the bow across them, and would have produced the same twanging and discordant notes which are invariably extracted from catgut during the process of tuning up had those rasping sounds fortunately not been inaudible to Meldrum and Wadlow.

A little breathing time was required, too, by the belles and beaux. They had danced conscientiously with a fervor unknown to modern *fêtes champêtres*. Layers of breeches and petticoats, in number like the skins of an onion, were conducive

to heat under an unclouded sun; but fashion, which ruled as tyrannically then as now, would not permit one of those integuments to be peeled off, though their wearers were roasting alive in them. There was no relief but in cooling down slowly, the process being aided by copious draughts of cider and home-brewed beer, which were fetched from neighboring booths by attentive swains for their ladies, and quaffed by them with undisguised satisfaction. The swains themselves preferred, for the same sanitary purpose, the genuine Hollands and cherry brandy which the ever-thoughtful Governor always provided free for these entertainments. When, furthermore, capacious pipes of tobacco had been smoked deliberately down to the last whiff, the gallants proclaimed themselves refreshed and all ready for another turn upon the sward.

Antony Van Corlear raised his trumpet to his thick lips as a signal for the next dance; the fiddlers tucked their instruments under their chins and scraped the opening bars of a jig; the laughing couples were preparing to take their places, when Meldrum and Wadlow saw a handsome, smartly-dressed young girl dash into the center of the still unoccupied space, hand in hand with her partner. As the two came to the front, all the other dancers fell back a little by common consent, and watched one of the figures with an earnest curiosity that was

fully shared by the nineteenth century spectators up there on the elevated railway platform.

"It is the young belle just from Holland," said Meldrum.

"Easily recognized by the unusual shortness of her petticoats. We must take the grave historian's statement of their number as only six for granted. From our point of view—which is not quite as good as I should like—we cannot count them."

"She is about to execute the famous new jig taught to her by the dancing master of Rotterdam!"

"I am all eyes."

Diedrich Knickerbocker has chosen to leave posterity to judge of this novel Rotterdam jig by its effects alone. These were remarkable as recorded by that veracious chronicler and observed by the spellbound Meldrum and Wadlow.

"It takes with the young fellows. She'll be in great demand as a partner."

"Though, as a spectator, one sees it to better advantage."

"The older ladies—those with marriageable daughters at their side—scowl at it. But that is only human nature."

"And the daughters themselves pout their disapproval. But they will all want to learn the dance when they see how the young fellows like it."

"The doughty old Governor himself is beginning to be agitated. While he does not take his eyes for an instant from the center of attraction, his frown shows how much he disapproves of the new-fangled jig. What would he say of the modern ballet, I wonder?"

"Do look at that scapegrace Antony! Nothing could be more to his taste. With eyes riveted on the whirling nymph, he is mastering the intricacies of the new dance. If he could have his own way, he would insist on its universal adoption—at least by the younger and handsomer of the fair Manhattanese."

At this juncture that startling incident occurred of which the excellent Diedrich gives the scantiest of particulars. His readers are only informed that it produced great consternation among all the ladies present; that the gravest of the male spectators, who had hitherto maintained their equanimity, were not a little moved; and that the good old Peter Stuyvesant himself was grievously scandalized. In a less primitive state of society all these profound emotions—whatever their cause—would have been gracefully masked and there would have been no perceptible disturbance.

Meldrum and Wadlow, taking, as they necessarily did, a bird's-eye view of things, were in no position to explain what must, therefore, ever remain a pro-

found mystery. They, in common with the rest of mankind, only knew that the Governor improved the critical occasion by recommending, on the spot, that every petticoat should henceforth be eked out by a flounce. Also, that he forbade, under the pain and penalty of his high displeasure, any young lady to attempt what was then termed exhibiting the graces, but would now be called the poetry of motion. And this is the right place to remind the student of fashions and of sumptuary legislation that the most paternal of governors made a bad failure of his decree about the ladies' dresses of his day. For the gentle sex, upon whose hearty approval and co-operation he had innocently relied, declared a revolt against his edict and threatened, if the matter were pushed to an issue, to discard altogether the garments with which he was presumptuously meddling.

Such, at least, was the alarming report made to his excellency by his trusted confidant, the burly trumpeter, who knew the women of New Amsterdam better than any other man; and who had not been, in the slightest degree, disturbed by the untoward incident that had thrown everybody else into such a flutter.

The charming center and object of all this dire commotion was still spinning round in the arms of her nimble partner,—unconscious, like himself, of

what had happened,—and Meldrum and Wadlow were still doing the best they could to see the minuter details of the spectacle without opera-glasses, when their day-dream was suddenly shattered by a voice behind :

“I say, w’ot yer lookin’ at yonder? Give a feller a peep, can’t yer?”

“Your best chance is down there, in the front row,” said Wadlow, turning round, and still under a powerful impression of the reality of what he had imagined.

The questioner, a rough fellow, stared vacantly at the open space beneath and then at the two friends, as if doubting their sanity. They, in turn, when they again cast their eyes at the spot, a moment before so crowded with life and human interest, saw nothing to remind them of the delightful dead and gone Dutchmen of Stuyvesant’s reign save a knot of newly-landed German immigrants, stolidly smoking their pipes or nibbling at pretzels as they lounged along the walks.

Meldrum snapped his watch open and discovered to his amazement that they had spent about half an hour and missed several up-town trains while trying the reproductive powers of their imagination on that consummate drollery of Irving.

“It is time well put in,” said Wadlow.

“I don’t grudge a minute of it,” was the answer.

As the twain were jerked and jolted homeward, the many annoyances of a ride on the elevated railway could not prevent them from musing contentedly on the infinite prospect of pleasure held out to them by the surrender of their willing minds to the fiat of literary enchanters.

CHAPTER III.

THEIR MOMENTOUS EXPERIMENT AT WEEHAWKEN.

WHAT were the limitations of this new gift of whose delightful potency they had become aware? Would it extend to purely historical scenes and characters? If so, a fruitful field for its exercise would be opened up to them. Strange to say, Irving is the only true enchanter who has cast the spell of creative genius over any locality in the great city of New York. Meldrum and Wadlow had been tied down to Irving by the very conditions of the experiments they had made. And they soon exhausted the local material of his bewitching pages in trials mostly unsuccessful because the ancient landmarks were so completely erased. With the exception of the Battery and Bowling Green, which they utilized to the utmost, there was little to which their faith could be pinned as really identified with any of the abounding comic action of the Knickerbocker History.

In veritable historical events of the profoundest gravity and the liveliest dramatic interest, the annals of the city and vicinity are rich. If one does not

want to go back more than a hundred years he may still find in and about New York houses not yet razed and places not yet built over or otherwise changed out of all recognition, whose connection with the great men and the great deeds of the last century is established beyond dispute. There is no fun in it all, like that supersaturating the Irving fictions of Wouter Van Twiller and William the Testy. But to the patriotic, worshipful mind, it is improving if solemn. At all events, more congenial material seeming to fail, it was the last resort of Meldrum and Wadlow.

Casting about for some subject matter for a decisive test, in the application of which they could muster up the needed enthusiasm, they finally pitched on the Burr-Hamilton duel at Weehawken. As students of their country's history they had both been deeply impressed by that saddest and most needless of our early political tragedies. It had fixed itself in their minds both by its importance in rudely terminating the brilliant career of one of the most gifted and versatile public men that ever lived and—perhaps even more—by its intensely spectacular character. They had read all that cautious, impartial historians from time to time had said about it, each one contributing his fresh little grain of fact. They were conversant with the partisan lives written respectively by friends and ad-

mirers and apologists of Burr and Hamilton. These, differing in much else, substantially agreed in their versions of the deadly encounter. After all this reading and reflection on the causes and consequences of the most famous of American duels, and on the striking personality of the principals, it would seem to be even easier to cause that combat to be refought on the known scene of its occurrence than to conjure up the new Rotterdam jig that had only been imagined by that roguish young Irving.

The two friends, in their frequent discussions of this topic, did not then realize the vast difference between fiction told as fact by some great master of the narrative art (whose genius stamps his most fantastic creations with the seal of reality) and fact put forth in affidavit style by some scrupulous plodder after the naked truth. They were soon to learn which was the more suitable for the experiments they were making.

One cool November morning, close upon sunrise, Meldrum and Wadlow appeared at the foot of West Seventieth Street, where they knew that some boat could surely be procured to carry them across the Hudson to Weehawken. They might have made the trip comfortably by steam ferry from Forty-second Street, but that would have involved a walk of some distance to the dueling ground. They preferred the more direct journey by small boat,

because it was in such a craft that each of the distinguished principals, with his second, traversed the river on that fateful July 11, 1804, starting, as it might be, from that very spot. Making allowance for the difference of seasons, the hour for embarking was about the same—soon after sunrise. Burr and Hamilton could not have eaten much breakfast in the haste of their departure, at dawn, for the rendezvous. Meldrum and Wadlow had eaten none whatever. They had indulged the notion, which remained to be exploded, that their psychical power (as they provisionally termed it) would probably work better on an empty stomach than a full one. They naturally wished everything to be highly favorable for the forthcoming test, the most delicate and dubious hitherto contrived. A good breakfast on their return to town by nine o'clock, would reward or console them, as the case might be.

Only one boat hovered in waiting at the foot of Seventieth Street when they arrived there blown and wheezing from their fast walk. It was a paintless, shabby thing, with a good deal of water in it, which the owner, a lank, slouch-hatted fellow, was bailing out with a rusty tin dipper.

“We want your boat and you with it,” was the breathless request of Meldrum.

For answer the strange being shoved off out of the reach of the new-comers with a quick push of oar

and then said, "Wot fur?" His eyes and voice betrayed acute suspicion of something.

"To cross the river," exclaimed the astonished Meldrum.

"Yes, I know. But wot fur?" repeated the boatman, paddling a little further out.

Though vexed at losing time by the colloquy, Meldrum could not help laughing at the man's inquisitiveness, as he answered, "For the Burr-Hamilton dueling ground, and we want you to land us as near to it as you can."

"Brer Hamerton drillin' groun'—I never heerd of it," was the sullen retort, as the speaker put another watery rod between the strangers and himself, and he added as a clincher, "I've bin boatin' roun' here more'n twenty year."

Meldrum and Wadlow joined in a whistle of amazement. They had rashly taken for granted that every river boatman whose station was anywhere opposite the Weehawken shore must at times have ferried to it pilgrims like themselves. They had counted on his services, if required, to pilot them to the scene of the duel after landing. Though they had no doubt about finding it for themselves, failing a guide, so well had they mastered the topography of the subject by late and assiduous inspections of the best authorities. The first thing was to get over the river; and, for some

reason far from obvious, the boatman was disinclined to transport them. In fact, he was gently paddling himself off all the time.

"What's the matter? Afraid of us?" shouted Wadlow.

"Well—I have ter look out for myself. Sometimes I gets taken in!"

"Take *us* in and you *wont* be, this time," jocosely responded Meldrum, producing a wad of bank-bills in proof of good faith.

The man's frown relaxed; but he was not yet satisfied. "Have yer any plunder—I mean kits—with yer?" he asked, coming a little nearer.

"Plunder? Kits?" echoed Wadlow. "Oh, you mean baggage! None whatever."

The boatman cast another sharp look at his customers to be sure they were not deceiving him; then, as if still a little reluctant, he said: "It's three dollars fur the job over and back inside two hour."

"Agreed," and the paymaster of the twain counted out the desired sum, which he shook at the man, who now, with quick strokes, brought his leaky boat to shore. Money paid and friends aboard.

When they had got fairly outside the pier heads, Meldrum broke silence. "Come now, my friend, what did you take us for? Be honest." His kindly

manner would have disarmed the stubbornest suspicion.

The boatman looked up sheepishly. "No offense, yer know—I'm sure it's all right now—but I jest thought yer might be—yer wont get mad—"

"No! no—out with it!"

"I thought mcbbe yer were—yer'll 'xcuse me, I hopes—thieves—burglars—and sich like. Yer see they allers wants ter cross about sun-up and is allers in a ter'ble hurry. That's yer case, yer'll allow."

Bursts of laughter which threatened to shake the old boat to pieces were the response. Finally Wadlow commanded his features sufficiently to say, "So you took us for thieves, burglars, and sich like," and then went off again.

"Some of 'em dress better nor yer do," was the rower's candid remark, as he impelled his rickety craft with powerful strokes toward the western shore.

"'Taint my line ter be axin' questions or meddlin' with other folks' bizness," he continued, "but I don't want ter get inter no more sich scrapes as I did last Monday mornin'."

"Tell us about it."

The boatman then told his story glibly, like one who had oft repeated it to greedy hearers. Stripped of his embellishments it amounted to this: On the morning mentioned two men, as gentleman-

like as Meldrum and Wadlow, came running down to the dock out of breath. They carried carpet-bags in their hands. They wanted to get to Weehawken in no time, and would pay the boatman double fare to put in his best licks. He (the narrator) thought they acted mighty queer and their gripsacks were uncommon heavy. But, as he said, he never axed no questions. So he took 'em in, and a pair o' jollier gents he never see. They was larfin' an' singin' all the way and the furder they got from New York the happier they seemed. They'd praise his rowin' and say as how they'd back him agin Hanlon. Then he'd pull on them ash oars jest to the breakin' pint. Well, that trip beat the record by one minute an' a half, an' when the boat touched shore they both said the double fare was well earned and how thankful they was to strike Jersey safe an' soun'. Next thing he knew they grabbed their kits and jumped off and was over the rocks and inter the bushes like a flash. He yelled arter 'em, "Gimme my money," an' one of 'em yelled back, "Charge it to Slungshot Jack," which was the name of the biggest cracksmen in the whole United States. And what did the gents s'pose they had in them gripsacks? One hundred thousan' dollars in gole, silver, and bills! They'd robbed the Nash'nal Dead Sure Bank the night afore. Think of the low down meanness of men

who got a hundred thousan' dollar' for nothin', and then bilked a poor boatman out of his fare ! But that warn't all, he added bitterly ; when he rowed back ter the Ner York side, he found two p'licemen waitin' fur him, and they 'rested him as a 'complice fur helpin' the thieves escape, and they wouldn't believe his story of how they cheated him out of his fare. They took him ter the station-house where he was held awhile, and then let go, cos they couldn't prove nothin' agin him. But it was hard lines, gents, and who could blame him fur bein' a little keerful now.

His hearers courteously expressed the interest they had taken in this protracted tale, the murmur of whose flow had been broken in upon only by the monotonous clink of the tin dipper against the bottom of the boat as Wadlow ladled out water all the way across. They assured him that he was quite right in being particular about customers.

Near the point where they now landed a man in pea-jacket, overalls, and mangy fur cap was fishing from a rock. By his side was a basket from which he was mechanically helping himself to cold meat and bread, while he watched an unmoving bit of cork with the patient hopefulness of his kind.

“What's our short cut to the Burr-Hamilton dueling ground ?” asked Meldrum of this pattern angler.

The man seemed to grudge withdrawing his eyes a second from that stationary cork. Without glancing at the intruders, he answered, "Dunno nothin' about it."

"A stranger like ourselves, I see. I thought you might be living around here. Pardon!"

"I've lived in these parts morne'n ten year' an' it's the fust time I ever heerd of—wot dye call it?"

"The spot where Burr and Hamilton fought their duel. We want to visit it."

At the word "fought" the man looked up, with a gleam of intelligence.

"Oh, it's the old fightin' groun' yer after! Foller that path about ten rod and there yer are."

"Thanks," cried Meldrum and Wadlow, and they proceeded to climb with some difficulty the slippery rocks which the ebb tide had just laid bare. As they struck the path indicated, and were about to vanish into the low scraggy bushes, the fisherman hailed them with, "Say, Mister."

Meldrum, who knew he was the person addressed, turned to receive the communication.

"If yer goin' ter have a quiet mill,—strickly private like,—me and the boatman 'll go along and see fair play. Hey, mate?"

"Suttonly," was the boatman's instant reply, and his face beamed with pleasure.

The friends woke echoes in the rocky heights

with peals of laughter. First they were taken for burglars and now for pugilists. What next?

"You are very kind," said Meldrum at length, when their mirth had subsided. "But we are as peaceable as you are. We'll see you later." And no time was lost in covering the specified ten rods—twenty by chain measurement. The path, faint at first, soon became barely traceable. The last half of it showed no sign of recent treading. The way was stony, briary, and damp, and the explorers were fain to curse themselves for their quixotism in undertaking their tramp before breakfast, when they caught sight through the sumac bushes of a comparatively open space. There was the steel-blue river tossing up its wavelets to the sun. There were the big rocks, fallen ages ago from the beetling heights, picturesque in their mantlings of moss and ivy. There stood the venerable tree—it should be cedar—for three generations, the books said, the chief landmark of the dueling ground. Parting the bushy fringe and letting themselves through, the friends found the place less like a bowling alley in shape and dimensions than they had expected. But it was quite conceivable that the notorious resort for disciples of the "code" in 1804, might have been enlarged since that day by the felling of trees for firewood and by the blasting and removal of rock for building purposes. The once restricted area

might thus have been expanded to accommodate not merely principals, seconds, and surgeon, but a twenty-four foot ring and a select company of spectators. It suggested the modern prize-fight rather than the antique duello.

Meldrum and Wadlow knew from their reading that the last chip of marble had been knocked off and carried away by relic-hunters, sixty years ago, from the tasteful monument erected by Hamilton's friends, on the spot where he fell, soon after the event. No tree, rock, or board bore any inscription relating to the tragedy. Wadlow caught sight of a faint rude lettering in black paint on the face of an enormous boulder. Deciphering its weather-worn lines with eager curiosity, he made out this legend: "Here Pat Kilgore whipped Tom the Smasher in fifty-six rounds, June 24, 18—." A tribute doubtless paid by some ardent admirer of the "sport" and the victor. Out of the rubbishy store of his recollections Meldrum at length fished up those two names as having, years before, headed many a newspaper column, many a day, filled with microscopic particulars of the men's training, the state of the betting on them, and everything else antecedent to the "battle of the Giants," which came off at Weehawken in due time, and a faithful record of whose sanguinary rounds took up a page and a half of the *Trumpeter*. Wadlow, on his part, recalled with

equal accuracy the gratifying fact that the sheriff and his posse, armed to the teeth, had swept down on the fighters just after the sponge had been thrown up, bagged them and the seconds, and that they had expiated their violation of Jersey's draconian statute by a year in Hudson County jail. From that day pugilists have avoided a State so inhospitable to their order, and the "old fighting ground" of the fisherman had been abandoned to its native weeds and briars. And it was evident that he knew it, not from its distant and now quite forgotten connection with the Burr-Hamilton duel but from its modern and vulgar association with the last renowned exponents of fistcuffs who faced each other on Jersey soil.

"We are satisfied that this is the spot, eh?" said Wadlow, with the betraying accent of doubt.

"Ye—yes, especially as I am tired and confounded hungry."

In preparing for the task before them they had hung long and critically over different portraits of Hamilton and Burr, and had selected those which seemed best to express the character of the men as described by their contemporaries. These had been stored in their minds as images to be projected into space by an effort of the will. It was their design to reduce to a minimum the difficulties of this, their first venture, into the domain of plain

history. They had, therefore, resolved to eliminate from the problem the seconds Van Ness and Pendleton and Doctor Hosack, and expend their whole psychical force on one tableau, comprising two figures only. This would represent the supreme moment when the Vice-President of the United States took aim and instantly fired and General Hamilton, receiving the fatal bullet, discharged his own pistol in the air and then fell to the ground, face forward.

They measured off the ten paces in order to fix the exact relative positions of the combatants, Meldrum personating Hamilton at one end of the line, facing the sun, while Wadlow stood for Burr at the other. By way of rehearsal Wadlow raised his right arm, sighted along it, and said "Bang!" Meldrum acted his part with equal fidelity all but the falling headlong. Then, having stuck two long twigs into the ground to mark the sites, they climbed a rock which commanded a full view of the scene.

"A beefsteak would have put me in better form for this job, Madison. I don't feel quite up to it, I'm afraid."

"A hot cup of coffee is what I want, Felix. Hankering after it seems to knock the whole business out of my head. But now we're here, let's try hard."

"Here goes," cried Meldrum, as a signal to begin.

"I'm off," was the cheery reply.

In unison the friends folded their arms, opened their eyes wide, knitted their brows, set their teeth rigidly, strictly conforming to all the physical requirements of the game. In two minutes the mental strain, coupled with the tension of muscles, brought beads of sweat to their foreheads in the chill November air. Their faces were pale, their lips quivering, in spite of all efforts to shut them tight.

"See anything, Madison?" This in a hoarse whisper.

"Nothing, Felix," in a faint, guttural voice.

"Not a pigtail?"

"No,—nor a ruffled shirt."

The allusions here were to two marked features of the attire of each of the duelists, which had been impressed with peculiar distinctness on the minds of the daring experimenters. If these prominences, so to speak, could not be made to appear, by any effort of volition, as precursors of the figures full clad, then it was clearly useless to push the effort any further.

"Give it up, Felix?"

"I hate to, after all the trouble. If we had a bit to eat now, possibly—"

"Back in ten minutes, as the cards on office

doors always say—only in this case it *wont* be half an hour," exclaimed Wadlow gayly, as he jumped through the sumacs and disappeared.

Meldrum knew that his eccentric comrade was foraging for breakfast, and his absence on that humane mission gave him no anxiety. He had calmed down and cooled off by the time that Wadlow reported himself, much heated. In one hand was a goodly sausage, in the other a hunch of bread.

"The fisherman—part of his breakfast—you know—" gasped the obliging fellow. " Better than nothing."

The half-famished couple divided the supplies, and though, of course, these did not fill the aching void, they assuaged the ache temporarily. Hunger, for the present, would not divert their minds tyrannically from thefeat they had proposed.

"Now for it!"

"I'm with you!"

Three more minutes of enforced abstraction, intense thought, and strenuous putting forth of will power, with attendant facial phenomena quite painful to behold.

"What luck?" at length murmured Meldrum, not yet removing his eyes from the twig he was trying to turn into Hamilton.

"Fisherman's luck—nothing," sighed Wadlow,

who was seeking to erect Burr in place of the other stick.

Recognizing the complete miscarriage of their enterprise, they slid to the ground, and without more ado started for the boat. They were now anxious only to get back to town and a breakfast worthy of the name, the appetizing components of which rose to their minds with a vividness wholly denied to Hamilton and Burr.

As they retraced the path, they hastily canvassed the reasons why this novel experiment, from which so much had been hoped, had proved abortive. The lack of a substantial meal as a preparative for the mysterious operation—that should count for something, they thought. The lingering doubts as to absolute identity of place—those had their weight, they should say. But they were driven to conclude that the most serious, if not the only real trouble, lay in the imperfect and confusing mental picture of the duel which they had been essaying to set forth in palpable form. Neither of them, as they now confessed, had derived a luminous, sharply defined conception of the scene from the pages of any of the unimaginative historians and biographers they had consulted about it. The result might have been far different had that scene received, in advance, the mystic consecration which the true enchanter bestows on all he touches.

Meldrum and Wadlow were thereafter to ascertain, beyond any manner of doubt, the true and only explanation of the vexatious failure beneath the heights of Weehawken. They were to make other tests in the same line of investigation, and were at last to reach the solid ground of this conclusion, to wit: *that no personage and no scene, purely historical, can be conjured up unless previously steeped in the glowing imagination of the true enchanter; also, that, when creative genius breathes the breath of life into the dead men and women of history, they become no more vitalized and available, psychically, than the baseless imaginings of the same wonder-working brain.*

CHAPTER IV.

WITH SHAKESPEARE IN HIS MACBETH COUNTRY.

WHEN, in the fullness of time, Mr. Felix Meldrum was enabled to arrange his affairs for his first trip to Europe, it was a cause of much regret that the sympathetic Wadlow could not accompany him. Meldrum had been fortunate in his struggle for a competence; Wadlow the reverse. The one could take a protracted vacation with a full purse and a mind at ease. The other was tied down by conditions that made economy and continuous strict personal attention to business indispensable to meeting his living expenses. It was a familiar illustration of that irony of fate which separates deeply attached friends by the barriers of circumstance.

When Meldrum parted with Wadlow on the steamer's deck, he knew that he should greatly miss, in Europe, the society of the comrade of his little rambles at home. But he did not realize—one never does till it is lacking—the extreme scarcity of full companionship. In his inexperience, he expected to pick up new acquaintances, from time

to time, who would share his own enthusiasm in visiting those places abroad to which his heart most fondly turned because they were hallowed by genius. For the small taste of such exquisite associations which he had enjoyed in his own country, had whetted his appetite for them to a keen edge.

His trip to Europe was wholly prompted by a desire to feast his full on this subtlest of pleasures. Greatly to his disappointment, he found no one among the steamer's passengers who filled Wadlow's place in any respect. Such a paragon there might have been on board, but, if so, he remained undiscovered by Meldrum, because he was an integer in some social group already made up, to which admission was not to be had by an outsider on any terms. He played whist in the smoking room and shovel-board on deck; he was good-humored and affable to everybody within reach of his voice at the meals which he never missed; he improved every occasion to rivet a friendship with some man of about his own age (he confessed to thirty); but all his approaches, even toward the amiable sharer of his stateroom, were unsuccessful beyond a certain point. There was not one among them all who echoed, like Wadlow, his inmost thoughts and aspirations. And, if some substitute for that incomparable man had been found, destiny

would, doubtless, have foreordained for him a route through Europe entirely different from that which Meldrum had marked out for himself.

When he stepped on the Liverpool dock at the end of the voyage, his loneliness became oppressively painful. He had exchanged hearty good-bys with some nice people; but none among them had asked him to join them in their land journeys, and there were none with whom he would have cared for that close intimacy if he had been invited. He felt that he was craving something which was, in the nature of things, unattainable. Driven back on himself, his pride revolted at the thought of being so helplessly dependent on the sympathy of others. He tried to shake off the depression. He laughed at his own silly weakness. He said to himself, "Surely a man of my age should have resources within himself. He should not mope and whine like a child because he is left alone. It is too absurd."

Meldrum's sinking spirits rose again with these encouraging reflections. He addressed himself quite cheerfully to the prosaic formalities of passing the Custom House. These discharged, he took the next train for the north,—his destination being the land over which two of the greatest enchanters that ever lived—Scott and Burns—have cast their spell. The season was early for Scotland, and not a single

one of his passing acquaintances on ship-board entered the train with him. They were all bound for London.

Meldrum heartily congratulated himself on the fact that he should at least be free from the swarm of ordinary tourists whose headlong haste and impertinent chatter would only have annoyed him as he paid his devotions at the shrines of genius. Here he was mistaken. The time was fast coming when he would have been glad to exchange impressions with the flightiest and least enlightened of fellow-travelers who were "doing" Europe only to say they had done it; not, like himself, in pursuit of a refined and exalted pleasure.

At Dumfries, at Ayr, at Abbotsford, Melrose and Dryburgh Abbeys, on Lakes Katrine and Lomond, in the Trossachs, wherever, in bonny Scotland, Burns and Scott were summoned to his memory by some indelible local associations with their immortal works, he would have given something for an inclining ear into which he might have poured himself without stint. It was a question no longer of perfect sympathy, but of a tolerant listener. Such a one was not met with for the good reason that Meldrum was an unseasonable pioneer of the great annual pilgrimage which would overrun Scotland a month or two later. The only persons he encountered were commercial travelers or na-

tives with whom he (perhaps foolishly) disliked to air his heated fancies. It was only with the professional and feed custodians and guides that he could talk out of the abundance of his heart; and it always happened that they wanted to monopolize the talking and looked upon his rhapsodies as unpleasant interruptions.

More and more he missed the kindly, genial, thoughtful Wadlow, not merely as the man of all men who understood him, but as the sole sharer of that strange, new power of reproducing scenes and repeopling them out of the treasure house of memory. Castles, abbeys, lochs, rivers, bridges, hills and valleys, famed in story and song, were all under the spell of enchanters; but he found that to break the seals and to enter upon the full enjoyment of these objects and places required the aid of a wholly sympathetic heart and mind, such as Wadlow, alone, of all on his list of friends, possessed. To him, late at night, Meldrum would unbosom himself in long letters descriptive of his travels and impressions, and would receive prompt answers running over with appreciation and sympathy. This correspondence mitigated the pain of separation; but nothing is exchangeable for the presence of dear old-time friends, face to face.

In his delightful rambles among the guide-books, preparatory to going abroad, Meldrum had noticed

several appetizing allusions to the Macbeth country visitable by the Highland Railway. It was boldly claimed that the blasted heath where the witches performed their impious rites, and the identical Birnam Wood, could be seen from the passing trains. It mattered little to him whether these claims were true or not. Had he considered the subject in cold blood, he would doubtless have decided that Shakespeare drew upon his exhaustless imagination for the scenery of "Macbeth," as well as for that of "Romeo and Juliet" and the "Merchant of Venice." He would have cynically made up his mind that the Witches' Heath and the wood of Birnam were after-thoughts and cheap advertisements of the Highland Railway Company and the innkeepers. But the mood of enthusiasts is never skeptical. He longed to catch glimpses, if only flying ones, of the scenes associated with a master work of Shakespeare. With this purpose, he found himself one fine morning in June on a train bound from Inverness to Perth.

The fat green guidebook which he carried localized the Macbeth country with sufficient precision. But he did not want to be continually on the alert with eyes and ears for fear of missing the objects of his pilgrimage. So, when the guard closed the door of his carriage at Inverness, Meldrum tipped him a half-crown with the request that he should

be told when they were approaching Birnam Wood and the Witches' Heath. The guard grinned as he nodded and pocketed the silver. The grin annoyed Meldrum, for it conveyed, as plainly as words, the man's disbelief in the identity of the places in question. But he was less disturbed by it than by a palpable smile on the face of a well-dressed man who sat opposite to him. This person had been reading the London *Standard*, which he lowered to his knees when he heard Meldrum's remark to the guard. The smile which he delivered broadside would have been followed up with some observation — equally impertinent, no doubt — if Meldrum had not frowned and pulled his traveling cap over his eyes, and buried himself columns deep in his own morning paper. This he pretended to read very hard. Occasionally he would steal a glance at the person before him, who was also seemingly immersed in his journal, but upon whose lips and eyes that smile still lingered. Meldrum knew that he was facing one of those terrible doubters for whom all history is a lavish embroidery of fact with fiction, and every legend a pure lie.

Silence reigned on both sides, while the two occupants of the carriage kept up the elaborate pretense of reading, occasionally varied by glances at the landscape through which the train was leisurely jogging.

Presently the guard appeared and tapped upon the glass, which was promptly lowered in response. The smile upon his face this time was broader than before, as he cried out, "Witches' 'Eath, please, sir, in three minutes. The train slows up for it." A blush, compounded of vexation and shame,—for he did not like to be looked upon as the dupe even of a cozening guide-book,—mantled Meldrum's cheeks. This deepened as he chanced to catch, just then, the intensely amused expression on the countenance of his *vis-à-vis*.

"'Ere we are," exclaimed the guide, again grinning diabolically, at the window.

Meldrum's quick ear caught the sound as of a laugh from his provoking neighbor. It jarred painfully on the serious associations of the time and place, and went far to deprive the poor man of any pleasure he might have taken in a cursory view of the Witches' Heath. Heroically trying to forget the annoyance, he thrust his head out of the window, in wanton violation of the rules, and gazed upon the scene intently. The heath was a blasted one indeed, so far fully answering to Shakespeare's description. It was full of scraggy bushes, withered and leafless. Some of these reached a height of six or eight feet, with black branches, crooked and forked, recalling to Meldrum the long wands used by the three hags of the play in the incantation

scene. The heath was framed by dark woods, which seemed a fit hiding-place for all uncanny creatures that hated the light. As Meldrum peered into the gloomy depths of this forest he saw a tall, skinny woman hovering upon its border. It was really only a native who was boldly trespassing on the accursed domain to pick up a little fire-wood. But if Meldrum had not been conscious of a mocking eye fastened upon him at that interesting moment, he would have given reins to his imagination. He would have accepted that spectral figure, with a broken branch in her hand, as one of Shakespeare's witches, capriciously showing herself in broad day. If his railway carriage were only emptied of that miserable literalist and skeptic! If anybody, no matter how ignorant, were at hand to whom he might impart his emotions without fear of ridicule! Best of all, if Wadlow — the sympathetic — were by his side! He could not suppress a deep sigh, as he drew his head into the carriage at a turn of the road which shut out the dismal scene. Circumstances had robbed him of nine tenths of the pleasure he might have derived from the blasted heath.

“ Well, how do you like it? ” was the question put to him by the disagreeable man on the opposite seat, with sarcasm in every syllable.

“ I like it very much—if you will let me, ” re-

plied Meldrum, determined to defend the spot from all assaults, whatever his private misgivings about it might be.

"I wouldn't mar your happiness for worlds," said the person addressed, still smiling in a superior way, "I quite envy you the readiness with which you take the blasted heath as a fact instead of a coinage of Shakespeare's brain."

There was no better way out of the difficulty than to stand up for the world's bard against all comers.

"I fully believe in it," said Meldrum, with an impassive face.

"What, that Shakespeare had that place in his mind's eye, as the scene of the witches' talk with Macbeth?"

"Undoubtedly; he came up from London and picked it out before he wrote the play."

"Whew! Perhaps you will next say that you believe the play itself to be all true?"

"Every word of it," replied Meldrum, slapping his hand on his knee, as was his wont when excited.

"Including the witches themselves and the ghost of Banquo?"

"Them most of all. I swallow my Shakespeare whole."

Every feature in his fellow-traveler's expressive English face betrayed astonishment. This was suc-

ceeded by a puzzled look, as if, on reflection, he thought he might be the subject of a little practical joke on the part of the American. He had often heard that Americans were addicted to practical joking. But at that moment no appropriate remark occurred to him. And had it occurred, it would probably not have been uttered, for the reason that Meldrum had raised the barrier of two thicknesses of newspaper to further intercourse. One cannot well pursue a conversation which another deliberately fends off in that way.

After a protracted silence, during which Meldrum feigned to take a nap in the corner of the carriage, with the paper before his eyes, the guard re-exhibited himself at the window.

“Beg parding, sir,” said he, in a loud voice, to wake the American from his supposed slumber, “but we’re a-coming to Birnam Wood—leastways wo’t there is of it.”

Meldrum opened his eyes and could not fail to remark again the damnable grin which followed these words. And unless he was much mistaken, there was something very like a wink of the guard’s eye in the direction of the skeptical gentleman, who hoisted his paper again, presumably to hide an outburst of mirth. His tremulous hands, a moment afterward, indicated that he was vainly struggling to suppress a convulsion behind it.

But, true to his professed faith in the pretensions of the Macbeth country, Meldrum rose and protruded his head into the open air so as to lose not one inch of the coming view. The slowing of the engine announced the moment when passengers should be on the lookout for Birnam Wood. But, though all alive, he would not have known when he came to it, save for the timely prompting of the guard, who presented himself once more and, with an ill-suppressed chuckle, pointed to two mighty spreading oak trees, adding, "The rest of 'em went to Dunsinane, you know." It was the guard's regular little jest; and it had oft been recognized and approved with a smile, but it caused no relaxation in Meldrum's set visage, though a sound as of a smothered snort responded to it from the depths of the carriage.

If the twin survivors of Birnam Wood had been a grove of the first magnitude, Meldrum could not have displayed a livelier interest in the majestic souvenirs of the immortal tragedy. He looked and looked till long after the noble old trees were lost to sight. Then he pulled in his head and closed his eyes again as his most significant hint that he was to be strictly let alone, and the unpleasant person facing him respected it. But it was a real relief when, soon afterward, that individual reached his journey's end and got out, leaving the senti-

mental pilgrim to thank God and meditate undisturbed upon a proposition which he had been for some time turning over indecisively. "Yes," said he, at last, addressing vacancy in his most energetic manner, "I'll send for dear old Wadlow this very night. If he doubles my expenses, he will treble my happiness. A man to talk to—one of my own sort besides—is cheap at any price."

That night were mailed from Perth to New York two letters: one was superscribed, "Madison Wadlow, Esq., Attorney-at-Law, Van der Tromp Building," entreating him by the sacred bonds of their most ancient friendship to leave his lambs of clients to the tender mercies of other wolves, and report without delay at the Golden Cross Hotel, Strand, London. The other letter bore the address "Spinnage & Meldrum, Bankers, Broad Street," and made ample provision for Wadlow's traveling expenses.

CHAPTER V.

WITH DICKENS AT THE BULL INN—EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE NEW PICKWICK CLUB.

THE Pickwick Club, convened in extraordinary session at the Bull Inn, Rochester, could not have chosen a better night for their formal reception of Mr. Felix Meldrum and Mr. Madison Wadlow. The high, cold wind, howling through the deserted streets of the old cathedral town, and the heavy rain that beat fiercely against the window panes, made the snug club room with its cheerful open fire and its closely drawn red curtains seem most delightful by force of contrast.

The meeting place of the club was an oblong apartment of moderate size, with a low-raftered ceiling, buff-painted walls, and freshly-sanded floor; two even dozen of large arm-chairs, leather-cushioned and enticing; in the center a round mahogany table, and on one side a smaller table, fronting a chair, the tall, finely-carved back of which proclaimed its dignity and discomfort as the presiding seat. It was occupied by Joseph Smiggins, Esq., Perpetual Vice-President of the Pickwick Club. In private life he

bore quite another name, and his high reputation as a physician and all the qualities that go to make up a worthy citizen and a glorious good fellow, were co-extensive with the County of Kent. In the *Pickwick Papers* he receives but a single mention, and no portrayal of his person or character is attempted. It only appears from the record in the first chapter of that immortal work, that his firm yet conciliatory manner aided powerfully in averting, for a time, the fatal breach between the founder and Mr. Blotton (of Aldgate). The new *Pickwick Club* was happily exempt from rival ambitions and jealousies; but, had any personal controversy arisen to embitter the sweet monotony of its sittings, the successor and namesake of Joseph Smiggers, Esq., would, by his unfailing tact and good temper, have done much to restore harmony.

The club was organized some years ago to bring together stately the choicest spirits of Rochester under a name which they all loved. It consists of only twenty members. On occasions of ceremony they all wear the original, prescribed costume of a bright blue dress coat with gilt buttons, bearing the initials "P. C." with whatever other modern articles of attire please their individual tastes. It is a cause of regret that the Posthumous Papers of the parent club did not provide names enough to go round among this score of members. But the most

is made of the few that were handed down, and it is deemed a great honor to be chosen by ballot to bear them for the period of one year, while to be re-elected to the distinction is justly regarded as one of the most gratifying of compliments.

On this eventful night, at the moment we are raising the curtain to disclose the innocent secrets of the club, Mr. Winkle was standing with his back to the fire, gently toasting himself, Mr. Snodgrass was pushing aside a thick curtain and trying to peer into darkness with no other object than to kill time, and Mr. Tupman was sitting with a leg thrown over the arm of a chair and drumming absent-mindedly upon the center-table. This historic trio were known to the outside world, respectively, as a junior barrister, a curate, and a country gentleman who lived on his estate near Gad's Hill, Higham, by Rochester, Kent, for some years a neighbor and friend of Dickens, and who had not missed a meeting of the club since its organization. Near him, with a seriously preoccupied look upon his otherwise genial face, as if he were settling upon the exact phraseology of a few remarks to be made later on, sat a portly gentleman, head of one of the oldest county families, rich, benevolent, and universally liked, whose name in these pages shall be entered only as Mr. Blotton (of Aldgate), of whose restoration to membership, after a long-enforced absence, a

word may be necessary. Though the original Mr. Blotton made an ignominious failure of his presumptuous attempt to underrate the importance of Mr. Pickwick's great archæological discovery, and was justly expelled from the club in 1827, there is no reason to suppose that, in his exile from that charmed circle, he may not have been delighted, like the rest of the world, with the published report of its transactions, apart from his own unfortunate connection with it. Perfect cordiality among the members being properly regarded as an object to be fostered in the formation of the new Pickwick Club, it was deemed advisable to forget the one painful incident in the history of the old one, to rehabilitate Mr. Blotton (of Aldgate) and restore him to a full and recognized standing, and thus add another to the too few names available for club uses on special occasions.

Twenty-four hours notice that two Americans, warm admirers of Dickens and pilgrims to the inns and other places commemorated in the *Pickwick Papers*, were to be ceremonially received that night, had sufficed to bring out every member in spite of the storm.

Nothing broke the silence of the room but the crackling of the fire and Mr. Tupman's tattoo, executed with increasing vigor. It was the hush that preceded a long-expected tread of boots outside the

door. As the sound drew nearer, every member stood erect in an attitude of reception. The door opened, and lo! Mr. Pickwick himself, framed there like a full-length portrait from life, the bright light of the room bringing him out in full relief against the partial darkness of the hall. From gaiters to spectacles the likeness was faultless. The person upon whom fell the exalted responsibility of reviving Mr. Pickwick to the eye of flesh possessed admirable natural qualifications for his task. He was short and stout. That periphery which comes of a happy disposition and generous feeding belonged to him, as to the founder of beloved memory. His, too, were the beaming eyes and the winning smile of the great original. While he lives as the central figure and leading spirit of the Pickwick Club of Rochester, it will not fall to pieces; and as long as he presides at Quarter Sessions, under his real and honored name, none but the most incorrigible rogues will receive justice untempered by mercy.

Behind him appeared Meldrum and Wadlow, in conventional evening dress. As the three entered the room, they were received with a warm salute of hand-clapping, which subsided on a signal from Mr. Pickwick, who then performed the ceremony of a comprehensive introduction in these words: (As he spoke, he thrust one hand behind his coat tail,

and gracefully waved the other to assist his glowing declamation, after the manner of his great prototype.)

“ Pickwickians ! The illustrious man whose unworthy representative I am (“ No ! No ! ” and cheers) made one of his greatest discoveries by pure accident, you remember. You know by anticipation that I allude to the wayside stone with that mysterious inscription which a distinguished Pickwickian of his day (I will not say rival and detractor in the presence of our friend Blotton of Aldgate) pronounced to be nothing more than ‘ Bill Stumps—His Mark.’ But no one will for a moment gainsay the undoubted value of an accidental discovery recently made by me, for it is no less than that of these two American gentlemen, whom I now have the extreme pleasure of introducing to you. (Immense cheering, during which the recipients of the honor modestly bowed, with their hands on their hearts.)

“ Let me tell you how and where I found them. The other morning I strolled out to Fort Pitt for exercise. As I drew near the spot where Mr. Winkle and Dr. Slammer of the Ninety-seventh met to settle their little misunderstanding, I observed two gentlemen pacing off ground with the greatest care. Having finally measured it to their perfect satisfaction, they took their position

at the ends of an imaginary line and raised their right arms toward one another. Were they about to fight a duel? Unfortunately I had left my spectacles at home and could not see distinctly whether their hands held pistols or not. Their attitudes were certainly hostile. My magisterial duty was plain. I must interfere to prevent the effusion of blood and punish those who dared to violate the law even by intention. 'Hold!' I cried, at the top of my voice, running toward them as fast as my weight would permit; 'I am a magistrate.' The two gentlemen burst out laughing, and when I reached them in a breathless condition, it was some minutes before they could recover themselves. Meanwhile, I noticed no signs of deadly weapons; and the hilarious manner of the supposed duelists convinced me that they were the best of friends. 'Excuse me, gentlemen,' I said; 'there is evidently some mistake here.'

"'None on our part I hope,' said the taller of the two (Meldrum nodded his corroboration of the words.) 'We should be very sorry to have spent an hour trying to identify the scene of the Slammer-Winkle duel that didn't come off, and be mistaken after all. We thought we had found it and were for the moment imagining ourselves Winkle and Slammer respectively. It was a tableau representing the principals taking aim just

before the surgeon of the Ninety-seventh, having put on his glasses, discovered that Winkle was not the man with whom he had the difficulty the night before. You must think it very foolish,' continued the gentleman, 'but we are Americans, on the track of the Pickwick Club. Perhaps you can tell us if this is the place we are in search of.'

"'It is,' said I, repressing my pleasure at recognizing a spirit kindred to our own. (Deafening applause.)

"'Are you sure?' asked the other gentleman, with anxiety, which showed the deep interest he took in the answer.

"'I ought to be,' I cried, no longer able to contain myself, 'for I am Mr. Pickwick.' They looked at me with astonishment, evidently supposing I was mad.

"'Well, you look like him, anyhow' they then said. (A ringing volley of laughter from the club entire testified the truth of this remark.)

"'When I say I am Mr. Pickwick,' I continued, 'I mean that that is my official title as President of the new Pickwick Club. You must follow the trail of the club to its lair at the Bull Inn, where I pledge you a rousing reception.'

"'A thousand thanks,' they said; 'but you do not know who we are'; and they proceeded to hunt for their cards.

“‘Your names matter not,’ I replied. ‘It will suffice for the club that you are Americans, sharing our admiration for the matchless humor of Charles Dickens as shown in the *Pickwick Papers*, and paying the highest tribute to his genius by visiting this spot.’” (Frantic cheering, which cut short any further explanation from Mr. Pickwick, if any had been needed, as it was not.)

CHAPTER VI.

THE NEW PICKWICK CLUB ELECTS TWO HONORARY MEMBERS.

MELDRUM did not possess the gift of fluent public speaking attributed to all Americans by foreigners, but he recognized the necessity of upholding that current belief to the best of his humble ability. He sidled up to the little table of the Vice-Chairman, put one hand on it to steady himself, and thrust the other into the recesses of his vest to get that unruly member out of the way. The Pickwickians had seated themselves (at a gesture from their revered chief) and were looking at him through the kindest of eyes. Mr. Pickwick himself stood by his side, his head slightly bent forward to lose not a word. Meldrum felt that he was indeed among his friends. Thus emboldened, he began by modestly returning thanks for the extraordinary compliment paid to two men whose only possible title to it was their profound admiration of Dickens's masterpiece. (Resounding cries of "That is enough!" "But you are Americans, too!" Mr. Pickwick himself audibly added, "We love 'em.") These warm

expressions greatly reduced the intensity of Meldrum's nervousness. He came to look upon his hearers not as an audience but as a family circle, to which he was not making a speech but only talking conversationally. After a few halts and mumbles he said what he had to say in a manner which his subsequent recollection of it did not wholly condemn. He gave the Pickwickians a little outline of what his friend and himself had done in England during the previous month. When in London they had lodged at the Golden Cross, Strand, from which ancient inn the coach had set out that bore Mr. Pickwick and his friends to Rochester and world-wide fame. They had never looked out of their parlor window without recalling in imagination, and he might say witnessing, (sensation) the assault upon the little group of Pickwickians by the infuriated cab-man. They had fondly recreated every feature of the scene and struggle. In this labor of love they would have been much assisted if they had known the precise locality of that pump under which the hot-pie man suggested that the supposed informers should be put. Could some gentleman present tell them where it was situated? ("In the court-yard of the old inn, now closed up and built over," responded Mr. Pickwick instantly, for he was a perfect encyclopædia of information on the subject.) Meldrum had feared that his curiosity on this point

might be thought trivial. (Cries of "It does you honor," "Nothing is trifling to the true Pickwickian," "We love you for it," etc., etc.) They had spent a delightful day tracing out what was left—alas too little!—of the White Hart and the George and Vulture. They confessed that the Wellers, father and son, interested them quite as much as any of the other heroes of the enchanting story save the one and only Samuel Pickwick, Esquire. (The Pickwick of the hour smilingly bowed his thanks.) In saying this they would be understood to derogate nothing from the great claims that Mr. Winkle, Mr. Tupman, and Mr. Snodgrass, must ever have on their respectful homage as the immediate comrades of the renowned leader. (Here the junior barrister, the curate, and the gentleman from Gad's Hill rose and made mute acknowledgments.) Of course, as Pickwickian pilgrims they had not omitted Guildhall and Gray's Inn and other localities introduced in the matchless episode of the case of Bardell *vs.* Pickwick. And it need hardly be said that they had not forgotten Furnival's Inn, in an upper chamber of which that book was written which is richer in genuine humor and contains a larger number and variety of original and interesting characters than any other one book of any country or any age. (Stentorian applause.) If there was any scapegrace in the whole range of fiction

more fascinating than Bob Sawyer, they had not yet found him. It was Bob Sawyer's party that had inspired them to undertake a thorough exploration of Lant Street, in the Borough, for the romantic purpose of fixing upon Mrs. Raddles's lodging-house. As the *Pickwick Papers* afforded no clew to that domicile, they had preconceived a building very old and rickety, some least desirable survivor of the unfittest among the improvements of the last fifty years, as one that might, perhaps, have been in Dickens's eye. Great was their disappointment to discover that most of the houses in Lant Street answered that general description. It was a question which one of a hundred shabby fronts should be mentally associated in the future with Bob Sawyer's party. They had reluctantly given it up after inspecting Lant Street from end to end. (Murmurs of sympathy, as every member of the club recalled his equally unsuccessful efforts to do the same thing.) Not less fruitless was their persevering labor to identify Mr. Pickwick's residence in Goswell Street. They would never dare to tell anybody but a confirmed *Pickwickian*, that they had walked up that street on one side and down on the other, and actually canvassed the probabilities that this or that or the other very old house was the one where Mrs. Bardell was the landlady and Mr. Pickwick the contented lodger, till she made

him defendant in the funniest breach-of-promise suit ever reported. They had taken many walks and rides about London on similar expeditions, which some would doubtless call sentimental. (Cries of "So they are!" "That is the highest praise!") Possibly foolish. ("No—never!") Some were successful, others not. But they (Messrs. Meldrum and Wadlow) were free to say that their search in that great city for places explicitly mentioned or vaguely referred to in the *Pickwick Papers*, had been for them the chief pleasure of their first visit to London. They could specify no better proof than their own delightful experience of the immense power wielded upon receptive minds by one of the truest enchanters that ever lived—Charles Dickens. (Prolonged and tumultuous applause, every member rising and waving his handkerchief.)

When quiet was restored, Meldrum summarized briefly the rest of their *Pickwickian* journeyings up to date. They had not conformed to the exact itinerary of Mr. Pickwick and his friends. For convenience they had reserved Rochester as the last, and, it might be added, the best. ("Hear! Hear!" from all parts of the room.) After an excursion from London to the Marquis of Granby at Dorking, out of respect to the memory of Mrs. Weller and the saintly Stiggins, they had struck due west for Bath. The White Hart Hotel, the Grand Pump

Room, the Royal Crescent where the four Pickwickians lodged during the greater part of their stay at Bath, and High Street, upon which had stood, in former years, the small green grocer's shop where Mr. Weller shared a friendly "swarry" with a select company of the Bath footmen—all these had a peculiar charm solely derivable from their incidental mention in the Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club. They had tasted the chalybeate waters only to certify the accuracy of Mr. Weller's statement that "they'd a wery strong flavor o' warm flat-irons." Thence to the Bush Inn, Bristol, scene of the Winkle-Dowler difficulty. Besides the happiness of recalling that ludicrous occurrence with the aid of all the original scenic properties, it had been their good fortune to settle, quite beyond cavil, the precise location of Mr. Bob Sawyer's surgery. At all events, the premises to which the speaker referred tallied, inside and out, in the minutest particulars, with those where Mr. Sawyer kept up his delusive show of professional employment. The red lamp and the inscription, "surgery," in golden characters on a wainscot ground, still existed (Meldrum was pleased to say) to assure the world that the same "snug little business" was yet carried on at the same old stand to this day. (At this announcement a thrill of delight like a wave passed over the little audience.)

The Angel at Bury St. Edmunds, the White Horse at Ipswich, the Leather Bottle at Cobham, and the Bull at Rochester (as to which they fully corroborated Mr. Jingle's encomium of "good house—nice beds"), comprised the other *Pickwick* Inns, as they might be called, at which they had lodged and fed. He trusted it did not smack of irreverence or vulgarity when he added that these old hostgeries were always far more interesting to himself and friend than any cathedral, or abbey, or castle, or princely seat in the same locality, and that they were endeared to them by associations as real and precious as those that history links with any structure whatever reared by human hands. (Great applause.) Meldrum would not longer detain his kind friends with details—however pleasurable to themselves—of their wanderings, but would conclude by again thanking the club for the most hospitable reception which had been accorded them. (The speaker and Wadlow here seated themselves in yawning arm-chairs, which were thrust under them amid a whirlwind of cheers.)

The portly gentleman who has been already mentioned in these pages as wearing a preoccupied look, rose to his feet. When he was recognized by the chairman as Mr. Blotton (of Aldgate), Meldrum and Wadlow smiled and nodded their approval of the happy thought that had put him for-

ward as a spokesman of the Pickwick Club; for that a motion of some importance was about to be made by him was apparent from the extreme gravity of his face and a preliminary licking of the lips, as if to lubricate the machinery of speech. Mr. Pickwick led the applause which welcomed the rising of the restored Blotton, and by no means tended to relieve him of his constitutional diffidence. The exact speech which Mr. Blotton (of Aldgate) had memorized for the occasion did not come back to his mind until after the exercises of the evening were all over and he was bound homeward in his private carriage. But the speech which he actually delivered was none the less effective because it was short and interrupted by a good many hems and haws, for its sincerity and underlying warmth of feeling were obvious. Mr. Blotton (of Aldgate) managed to say that, in the opinion of all the members whom he had hastily consulted, the club should testify in some suitable way to the extreme gratification they had derived from the unaffected and eloquent remarks of the distinguished American gentleman. ("Hear! Hear!") Merely as Americans, that gentleman and his esteemed associate deserved the best wishes of all Englishmen because of the kindly sentiments which they evidently felt toward the old home and the old kinsfolk. (Cheers.) But to this strong claim upon

the hospitality of all present they had added, perhaps, the stronger one of being—Pickwickians. (Great applause.) They had made—of course, he said it with the caution and reserve of a confirmed archæologist — a discovery at Bristol which immensely enriched the fast vanishing stock of Pickwickian relics and mementoes. (Much enthusiasm.) As a small token of the club's appreciation of these valuable services, and as a mark of good will to their American cousins, he begged to move that Mr. Felix Meldrum and Mr. Madison Wadlow, of New York, be and are hereby elected Honorary Members of the New Pickwick Club, of Rochester, England. (Tremendous demonstrations of approval of every known variety.)

Mr. Winkle seconded the motion in a short, felicitous speech, and, being put by the Acting Chairman, it was carried with a chorus of "yeas" that rattled the window-panes. All semblance of order was then thrown aside, and the members thronged about the Americans, shook their hands, patted them on the back, and generally violated, in the most flagrant manner, all the traditions of British reserve.

Meanwhile, Mr. Pickwick had given a preconcerted signal, upon which the door was opened by unseen hands and a delicious odor penetrated the apartment. It proved to emanate from an enormous bowl, borne aloft with scrupulous care by a

waiter clad in the club livery. From its invisible interior a steam arose like incense, of a pungency and fragrance which carried Meldrum and Wadlow back for the moment to their college days, with whose memories it was indissolubly associated. The servant advanced with a stately tread as if conscious of his great responsibility, and placed the steaming bowl on the center-table, the use of which now became apparent. As it was lowered to the level of the eye, one discovered beneath the softly curling vapors a rich amber liquid in which golden bits of lemon bobbed up and down. A second uniformed waiter entered with a jingling tray of glasses, and a third with two dozen long-stemmed clay pipes tipped with red sealing-wax, and a huge jar of light-colored fine-cut tobacco. The deep hush which had fallen upon the club, while these mysterious preparations were taking place, was broken by Mr. Pickwick, who moved that the club do now adjourn for refreshments. This motion prevailed without even the formality of a vote, Joseph Smiggers, Esq., vacating the chair precipitately, as if he had become a little tired of the protracted dry talking. They all gathered around the center-table, or as near to it as they could get, and proceeded to test the contents of the great bowl, which were ladled out by the waiter's practised hand. When to the odor of the liquid was joined the tasting of it, Mel-

drum and Wadlow had no hesitation in classifying it as punch,—and very good punch. Mr. Pickwick, who sat next to them, had watched them with some interest as they raised the glasses to their lips. A gleam of pleasure shot through his spectacles as he marked the gratified expression of their faces, while they drained the goblets to the last drop. “We call it Pickwick Punch,” he at length explained, in his most genial manner. “It is brewed from a recipe which has been for a century in the possession of the Bull Inn. We may readily imagine its like to have been enjoyed by the original Pickwickians during their stay here.”

“It is worthy of them,” said Meldrum, smacking his lips and holding out his glass for another ladleful.

Mr. Pickwick furthermore informed his new friends that the constitution of the club expressly enjoined the observance of simplicity in their entertainments. Punch and pipes were their only festive indulgences on occasions even of ceremony. The sole exception to the stringent rule was made on Christmas eve, when a costume ball was given in the same great hall of the hotel where the famous mixed assembly was held on the 13th of May, 1827. Then only were the extravagances of a supper permitted. Meldrum and Wadlow were pleased with this intelligence, for they had feared the possibility

of a formal banquet in reserve, with interminable set speeches and other tedious concomitants. "Songs, stories, tales of adventure, local traditions, reports of investigations throwing light upon the obscure manners and customs of the dear old Pickwick era, and more accurately identifying places mentioned under fictitious names in the Papers,—these (said Mr. Pickwick) form the innocent exercises at our regular meetings. We firmly believe that the Founder himself would relish our society if that most real of imagined characters could be with us bodily." In this opinion the Americans fully agreed, when the gentle stimulus of the punch had unlocked the tongues of all present. Every one contributed of his best freely and spontaneously to the harmless mirth and glorious good fellowship of the evening. It was a point of honor with all to listen attentively to and applaud the efforts of each as he sought to add to the common stock of pleasure. While this award was denied to no one, special favor and grace were vouchsafed to a story of Western life, well told by Meldrum, and to a new sentimental song, set to a new tune and rendered in a good tenor voice by Wadlow. The latter received an enthusiastic encore, which was responded to by a couple of fresh stanzas, and when the singer was pressed for the names of the author and composer, he replied, "A friend of Meldrum."

"In other words, Wadlow himself," said Meldrum, punching his comrade in the ribs in the fullness of his heart. Whereupon a copy of the words and music was asked for by Mr. Winkle, as perpetual secretary, for preservation in the archives of the club.

It was not till a second bowl of the excellent punch had been finished and the tobacco supply reduced to a mere pinch of snuff in the bottom of the jar that the party broke up with *Auld Lang Syne* and all hands round.

It had been the privilege of Meldrum and Wadlow to occupy, during their short sojourn at the Bull Inn, a spacious double-bedded room known as "the Pickwick." It was firmly and truly believed by all the chambermaids of the house to have been tenanted by the great man himself. Having often heard his honored name mentioned with the deepest respect by so many visitors, he was to them as actual a personage of the past as Lord Nelson or the Duke of Wellington. They bestowed an affectionate solicitude upon their care of the room, sharing, without knowing the reason why, the profound interest which strangers from all parts of the world exhibited in it.

When the two Americans, after detaching themselves with much difficulty from the tenacious grasp of the jovial company down-stairs, proceeded to re-

tire for the night, they found it harder than ever to shake off the impression that the *Pickwick Papers* were no fiction, but formal biography, though cynics may say that there is little difference, if any, between the two kinds of books. They both fell asleep while musing on the potency of that enchanter, who, after a lapse of fifty years, had called them from the other side of the Atlantic to see the places haunted by the shade of an imaginary hero and to take part in the proceedings of a club that bore his name and perpetuated his memory, on the very spot where his unreality was best known.

CHAPTER VII.

WITH SCOTT AT KENILWORTH.

“WAITER, can’t we have our chops served on those old tin plates?”

Meldrum was the speaker. He pointed to certain battered disks of shining metal, carefully ranged on the top shelf of a sideboard near the table where he and Wadlow awaited luncheon.

The waiter shifted his napkin from one arm to the other, drew himself up with some dignity, and replied, “Them is Kenil’orth plates, sir; the real harticle, and, beggin’ your parding, not tin, but solid pewter.” He could not have laid more emphasis on the name of the material had it been sterling silver. Then, observing a look of incredulity on the questioner’s face, he added, “They ‘as the genooin horiginal mark on the back, you see.” He took one from its perch and exhibited “K. C.” deeply engraved in old English text. The two friends inspected it with much curiosity.

“Whether authenticated or not, they’ll give an archaic flavor to the chops,” said Wadlow.

The waiter did not catch the precise import of

this remark, owing to the limited extent of his vocabulary; but he scented skepticism in it. It was in an indignant tone that he further explained, in response to the first query, "They is hextry, sir, six pence apicce."

"All right, we'll take them," said Meldrum, as delighted as his companion to carve the slow-coming chop on a pewter plate which might, for aught he knew, have shone in the buttery of Kenilworth, three hundred years ago. "And those big pewter mugs?" he continued, interrogatively, nodding at some badly dinted, but highly polished, objects of that description suspended from nails, by their handles, just above the plates.

"Kenil'orth mugs," answered the waiter, distantly; but this time he did not show the identifying initials which adorned their sides, expecting his hearers to take him at his word. "It's thry pence hextry to use 'em."

"Very good. Fill them with the oldest of old ale," exclaimed Meldrum, and he smacked his lips in anticipation of the deep, cool draught of that nourishing fluid which he had good reason to expect from the tap-room of the best inn in Kenilworth. Then, still pursuing his researches for the antique, his eye fell on what seemed a piece of wood-carving, brown with age, which decorated the sideboard. "What's that?" he asked.

"Wenison pasty, sir. Its 'arf a crown to cut it."

"From Kenilworth castle?"

This ironical inquiry was received by the waiter with deserved silence, as he carefully unhooked the desired pewter utensils and proceeded to leave the room with them.

Meldrum sought to placate his hurt feelings with an order to follow the chops with the venison pie.

"*Pasty*, sir," said the waiter, correcting him, as he vanished.

The Americans accepted the correction in a thankful spirit. Drawn to Kenilworth by the magnetism of Scott's great novel, they desired, before visiting the castle, to put themselves into the most proper condition of mind to recreate, if possible, the noble pile which Scott describes, and to repeople it with the historic characters who live and move in his immortal pages. They were inclined to accept the pewter plates and the mugs as relics of Leicester's Kenilworth with blind faith. They cheerfully admitted that the dish of venison would taste better as pasty than as pie—because the former was undoubtedly the name under which it would have been eaten at the grand banquet given to Queen Elizabeth by her courtier-lover at his splendid castle in 1575.

In due time the chops were brought in, flanked

by large mealy potatoes in their jackets, and the marrowfat peas and cauliflower for which England is deservedly famous. The pewter plates had been heated nearly to the melting point, and the meat hissed as it touched the fervid metal. The old ale proved to be worthy of the old mugs, which in turn seemed to impart a relishing electric twang to the contents. Meldrum had looked forward with much pleasure to the production of the venison pasty as the second course. He had mischievously planned the summary destruction of the imposing work by plunging a carving knife deep into its reeking bowels and then giving it two quick cuts, hari-kari fashion. He and Wadlow had speculated on the consternation of the waiter when he should see the elaborate structure brutally sacrificed in this way. Great was their chagrin when that person placed the pasty on the table, and without a preliminary word, proceeded to dissect out two thin wedge-like segments—an operation which required a wrist of iron. The crust was a full inch thick, with almost the resisting power of wood itself. A hammer and chisel and fine saw seemed to be the implements most suitable for exposing the interior. Then he scooped up with a tablespoon the accompanying diminutive portions of meat, dry, if not moldy with age.

When this second course was placed ceremoniously before the guests, they looked at it, sniffed at

it, probed it with forks, and then expressed their regret that the hearty repast afforded them by the first course should have compelled them to forego the pleasure of testing the unquestioned merits of the venison pasty. Whereat the waiter looked so much grieved that Meldrum tipped him a shilling on the spot with gratifying effect. He then consulted his watch and moved back from the table with the remark, "Now for the castle. I wish we had a good guide who would speak only when he is spoken to."

"I can get you one in a minute, sir," said the waiter, politely. He stepped briskly to the door and called "Flib! Flib!" as if to a dog outside. A moment later a shock-headed boy,—if he was not an undersized man,—dressed in homespun clothing, and awkward in every expression and movement, appeared upon the threshold as if he had responded to a summons not unexpected. "This is Flib," explained the waiter; "the best guide to Kenilworth. He thought you might like him for the job and was hangin' round."

"Excuse me," said Meldrum, "but you have a very singular name—Flib, as I understand it."

"It's short for Flibbertigibbet," was the only response.

"Oh, I see! the impish dwarf in the story."

"Exackly."

As the stunted person proffered no further explanation, the waiter spoke up for him.

"You'll recollect, sir, that the reel name of Flibbertigibbet was Richard Sludge. This ere boy,"—he corrected himself—"man, is a genoooin Richard Sludge, who come straight down from the one that lived here three hundred years ago. The Sludges is one of the oldest families in these parts."

The dwarf nodded as if with ancestral pride, his stolid countenance betraying no sign of duplicity.

The Americans had often read of the generative persistence with which humble names have been handed down for centuries by families that are rooted like the sturdiest oaks in the tenant farms of England. They were not prepared to say that Dickie Sludge's genealogical descent could not be as clearly traced back in the county records as that of the Earl of Warwick. If, as was probable, the name was picked up by Scott during his sojourn at Kenilworth, while gathering local traditions for his novel and utilized in the tale because of its quaintness, then that was another evidence of the charm wrought by the potent wizard of the North. Even the yokels and hinds of Kenilworth testified to the reality of the universal spell in asserting their lineal claims of associations with the glorious memories of the castle.

Meldrum and Wadlow preferred to accept the

guide's pretensions without challenge, enhancing, as these did, the illusion which they were anxious to encourage to the utmost, however much self-deception it might involve.

The little party rapidly covered the dusty mile between the village and the ruins, which, at a sudden turn of the road, came into full view. The guide did not even say "there it is,"—a reticence fully appreciated by his patrons, who knew, from a prolonged study of guide books and photographs, precisely how the crumbled towers and battlements would look. They had no need of a cicerone except to save them a little trouble in locating readily some of the less recognizable features of the ruins without their Baedeker or Murray in hand.

Turning from the shady road into a large sunny space which fronts the pile, they startled their attendant out of his impassiveness by throwing themselves on the green sward. But he only looked amazed and said nothing. Their object in thus arresting their steps, instead of hurrying to the accomplishment of the tourist's customary task, was to reproduce the general effect of Kenilworth Castle by the reflected light of Sir Walter Scott. Concentrating their gaze upon the shattered masonry, and excluding all disturbing thoughts, they had no difficulty in seeing, through the inner eye, the vast and lofty structure of Leicester's day.

Sworn comrades of many vagrancies, they interchanged thoughts by glances, nods and curt gestures even more than by words, of which, in each other's company, they were never profuse. Their walking sticks were a sign language. After some minutes of a tacit survey, Meldrum leveled his cane at the obvious relics of a tower on the right, raised it at a moderate angle, and outlined in the air the probable original continuation of that part of the castle. Wadlow assented with two words: "Cæsar's Tower."

"Observe the Queen's flag?"

"Yes; I wish there was a wind to blow it out straight."

Flib had followed the mysterious pantomime with eyes which seemed ready to burst from their sockets. When the Royal Ensign was mentioned he started backward, as if doubting the sanity of the two gentlemen, and meditating a hasty retreat. What he further saw and heard did not tend to reassure him. There was another long pause, filled in by much hard looking and unintelligible brandishing of canes, succeeded by nods and grunts. Then Wadlow, whose attention had been fastened upon the well-preserved remains of Leicester's gateway, put this question: "How many men can you count on those battlements?" (Pointing at the place where the crenelated work should have been,

had any been left by the Puritan destroyers and the tooth of time.)

Meldrum hesitated as if telling off heads. "Well, fifty. Can you distinguish, at this distance, the real soldiers from the pasteboard and buckram figures?"

"Yes, easily. The warden on the ground there is eight feet high, I should say. A fellow of his size and strength could pick up a *Flibertigibbet* in each hand."

At this stage of a dialogue, hitherto enigmatic, the little guide burst into laughter, as one who makes a pleasing discovery and is much relieved thereby.

"Ha, ha! You makes believe you sees the giant what took up the first *Dickie Sludge* this way." And with pantomimic action, he represented a Goliath—personating the Colossus himself for the moment—stooping down and raising an invisible dwarf by the nape of the neck and holding that feather-weight at arms-length high in air.

The absurdity of the thing threw the Americans into paroxysms of mirth, which were not diminished when *Flib* cried out, "You shall see the big 'un lift me over again. Please make believe as hard as you can, now." So saying, the little man darted to the foot of Leicester's gate.

Meldrum and Wadlow slowly mustered up the seriousness necessary to make the attempt success-

ful. After Flib had stationed himself in the proper place the friends focused their minds upon him. First, they transformed the awkward little lout into an elegant undersized devil, with black jerkin and red horns and cloven feet, wanting only a forked tail to realize in miniature the arch fiend of old orthodoxy. The giant warder they had already conjured up, as described. It now remained only to imagine that son of Anak, snatching up the demon dwarf, playfully making sport of his terror, then lowering him to the earth and dismissing him with an affectionate caress. So naturally and vividly had Sir Walter portrayed this amusing incident—so deeply was it stamped on the memory of his two enthusiastic admirers,—that a brief but determined exercise of volition on their part enabled them to see it re-enacted, as if before their physical eyes. Even the dull-witted Flib shared in the illusion by lending himself to it.

“Oi likes it,” he said. “The joyant didn’t hurt me a bit.”

Immensely gratified by the success of their experiment so far, the friends, with Flib docilely following, instead of attempting to pilot them, (so great a respect had he already formed for their self-guiding capacity), rose to their feet and began a systematic exploration of the wide-spread ruins, triumphantly applying at this

point and that their peculiar method of reconstruction. It needed a rigid out-barring of all alien images to call up in that melancholy waste the cavalcade headed by the virgin queen on a milk-white steed, between close hedges of pikes and partisans, with the gold-clad Leicester on her right, their pathway lighted by hundreds of flambeaux and the air filled with exploding rockets. Night would have been more favorable for conceiving the illuminations and the fireworks. But the pyrotechnical display could be superadded to the other features of the grand pageant, simply by closing the eyes, when it instantly appeared on the dark curtain of the lid. No less easy was the materialization of the torch-lit fleet of rafts and boats, and all fantastic floating things, with the Lady of the Lake as the divinity in supreme command, who welcomed the august guest to all the sport which the castle and its environs could afford. But in order to turn noisome swamps into clear, blue water; broken buttresses into lofty, symmetrical towers; damp, roofless gaps into banqueting halls; and second-story dungeons into royal suites, one prerequisite was indispensable: there must be a reasonable confidence in the identity of localities. Given assurance on that point, all else followed quite as a matter of course.

When Meldrum and Wadlow had made the circuit of the ruins to the Swan Tower, they looked near it for some sign of the grotto where the helpless Amy Robsart concealed herself from her persecutor, and was discovered by the jealous queen. To imagine a grotto as picturesque as the original was easy enough, if they only knew its site. Here, for the first time, they turned to Flib for help.

“The grotto—where was it?” asked Meldrum.

The boy-man’s face glowed with pleasure as he saw himself in actual request. They followed his beckoning a few rods.

“It was ‘ere, sir,” pointing to the bare ground in an angle between two half-demolished walls. His brevity and positiveness carried conviction to minds that wished to be convinced. In two minutes they had the grotto up and the rustic seats in place and the fountain playing and the alabaster column in position, ready to lend support to the sinking frame of the lovely fugitive.

“Her hair was brown,” said Meldrum, musingly.

“And her eyes, also,” added Wadlow.

“Her complexion creamy,” returned the other. “Her neck swan-like, not in length, of course, but in grace of motion—thus,” and Meldrum twisted his head in poor elucidation of his idea of swan-likeness.

“Her age eighteen,” pursued his comrade.

“Her dress—what was her dress?” asked Meldrum.

Wadlow shook his head. “Ah! the book will tell.” He produced the second volume of Kenilworth from a side pocket, and, hastily thumbing its pages, found the required information. “Pale, sea-green silk.”

“There—there she is at last!” cried Meldrum.
“Do you see her?”

“Perfectly!”

They gazed in rapt admiration at the charming vision.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLEASANT BREAKING OF A PLEASANT SPELL.

"I SEES 'er too—but not there," exclaimed Flib, with unwonted energy.

The friends, startled, turned toward the guide, and saw him staring with open eyes and mouth at the window of a tower, some distance off.

"'Tis the lady 'erself, alive in 'er own room."

The allusion was instantly understood. The tower before them was Mervyn's, the least injured of all its kind in Kenilworth. The apartment where Sir Walter lodges his ill-starred heroine was on the second floor of Mervyn's tower, and gave on the Pleasance, at the end of which stood the grotto whither she had fled from a fate worse than death. Framed in the window which faced the beholders, her looks bent on the ground beneath, they saw a beautiful girl, with the brown hair, the white arching neck, the healthy pale complexion and the green dress of the original Amy Robsart. A modern hat jauntily cocked upon a head exquisitely shaped, was the only item not comprised in Scott's inventory of the Countess's attractions, native or

artificial. This flesh and blood copy was far superior to the phantom which they had but just evoked from nothingness, and they longed to see it at shorter range. In its presence the grotto and its furniture and its one inmate had vanished like a dream at waking.

Fearing that the lovely being at the window would disappear before they could reach her, the friends strode hastily toward Mervyn's tower, with Flib again superfluous at their heels. They knew from the closely-studied ground plans of Kenilworth, what door to enter, what turnings to take, and precisely how many steps to ascend, in order to attain the "small octangular chamber" of the story. As they neared the goal, they began to hear two female voices, and the words and tones were those of bosom friends engaged in a good-natured dispute.

"If we had a dear, delightful old ruin like this out in Minneapolis," said one voice, "wouldn't it be perfectly lovely?"

"You'll have ruins enough when the bust comes," was the response.

"When the bust comes in St. Paul, you mean? Very true. Your Ryan's Hotel and your Grand Opera House would, as ruins, be picturesque, which they aren't now. Perhaps we Minneapolitans will buy up the old stones and make an imitation Kenil-

worth out of them for our beautiful new park. Ha, ha!"

"Wait five years and your big flour mills will give you all the spare stones you want for a Kenilworth and a Coliseum to boot—there now!" and a silvery peal of laughter terminated the sentence.

The other voice was about to retort, when Mel-drum and Wadlow interrupted the lively conversation by appearing upon the scene. The duplicate of Amy Robsart had turned from the window and faced the newcomers. At the close inspection now afforded them, her charms fully matched those of the Countess whom Sir Walter drew. By her side stood another lady who recalled no particular heroine of any novel, but impressed one at first sight as meriting a place in some lively work of fiction. She seemed to be several years older than the fair creature at the window. That indefinable quality which everybody knows and admires as archness crinkled in her light, curly hair; pouted in her full red lips, asserted itself somewhat audaciously in her piquant nose, and welled out from two deep dimples in her rosy cheeks. Her neck was not swan-like, but yet a manly arm would have found room enough for itself there. Worshipers at the shrine of willowyness might have criticised the generosity of some of this lady's outlines. But when informed that she was a widow, they would,

it may be trusted, have been swift to confess that a reasonable amplitude of person is not unbecoming to one who has no longer a marital prop to lean upon and twine about. This substantial creature was owner of the voice which had been summarily hushed by the incoming of two strangers; but it made itself heard, without a moment's hesitation, when the speaker marked, at a single glance, their nationality.

"I'll leave it to you, now. Isn't Minneapolis more of a city, every way, than St. Paul?"

She plumped this question so naturally and off-handedly at Meldrum that he was no more taken aback by it than if she had asked him the time of day. Her face was full of archness and roguery, as she waited for his answer.

Meldrum knew all that the strange question implied. He was well aware that the aversion between young rival American cities increases in geometrical ratio to their nearness, and reaches its utmost intensity in the case of St. Paul and Minneapolis, which are contiguous. They are called the Twins, and have quite naturally fought from the cradle upward. Meldrum had never visited either city, and could honestly plead absolute ignorance as a bar to any response. To oblige the possessor of all that archness, he would gladly have said "Yes," but for the presence of St. Paul's bewitching representative,

who fastened her soft brown eyes on him, in mute appeal. Out of his perplexity he soon found an escape by luckily recalling some sentences he had once read in the glowing advertisement of a trunk railway line, with termini both in St. Paul and Minneapolis.

“They are both Queens in their own right,” said McElrumb, falling back on his memory; “the pride and the glory of the new Northwest—the—” here he broke down, and then happily recovered himself with the hackneyed line slightly amended for the occasion—“The tourist could be happy with either, were t’other dear charmer away,” a quotation not wholly misplaced, if stretched to apply also to his two lovely compatriots of the moment in Mervyn’s tower.

“Judiciously neutral? I see,” said the merry lady, her eyebrows arching in visible token of the spirit that possessed her. “And you, sir, what do you say?” she continued, turning to Wadlow, who, lawyer-like, had anticipated the attack and prepared himself for it.

“I think that Mr. St. Paul and Miss Minneapolis are in the way of making a happy match. They have that little aversion which Mrs. Malaprop recommends as the best thing to begin with. As a friend of both parties, I—”

“Non-committal, too,” interrupted the vivacious

lady. "Well, Mandy, we shall have to fight out our little differences alone. Ha, ha?"

Meldrum and Wadlow bowed in token of their cheerful acquiescence.

"Shall we call a half hour truce now, Carrie?"

"As you please, dear," was the reply. "But I shan't soon forget that shot at my flour mills."

"It was fired in defense of my Opera House—tit for tat—you know."

Arch ladies are expected to be volatile; and the subject of conversation was instantly changed by the one called "Carrie."

"I've no patience with that horrid Leicester," she cried, with mirth in every tone, leaving her male hearers in doubt whether she was serious or joking. "I was looking through the novel again this morning. I do so much want to see the exact spot where the Queen exposed and humiliated that heartless villain," and fun irradiated her face as she spoke. "Isn't it somewhere out here?" She pointed toward the Pleasance.

Flib saw a practical opening for his services. As he stepped forward, the younger lady stood aside, and the dwarf indicated with outstretched hand the place assigned by Sir Walter to that memorable transaction.

"I must have just one good long look at it," and the arch lady stared protractedly at the spot. Her

friend shared in her eager curiosity, but was more serious and pensive of demeanor.

“The Queen ought to have cut off his head when he was kneeling there—the double traitor—Ha, ha!”

“Why, Carrie!” in a tone of mild remonstrance.

“If I had been in her place I would have borrowed a sword from Raleigh,—of course the Queen didn’t wear one,—and done it in a flash,—like that!” She saucily snapped a thumb and finger to illustrate the swiftness of the supposed decapitation.

“But the Queen hadn’t the heart to do it. She loved Leicester as much as Amy Robsart did.”

“All the more reason why she should have chopped his head off. It would have punished Leicester for his perfidy to herself. It would have avenged Amy Robsart for his brutality. He would not have lived to cause her death by an accomplice.”

“But Amy herself would still have died of a broken heart, for you know how she idolized him. And the Queen, too, would have pined away with grief and remorse if she had taken his life with her own hand.”

“I suppose so,” was the reply, with intermittent laughter; “and I should have had no pity for their fate. The idea of two women making such fools of themselves for any one man.” The absurdity of the conception convulsed the well-shaped figure.

“What do you say now?” and she turned quickly to Meldrum.

“It is not for me to pass judgment upon those ladies. But, as to Leicester, he deserved no mercy from any one—least of all from the Queen who had loaded him with favors. History would have applauded her if she had killed him in that blazing moment of righteous indignation.”

“It is a comfort to think that the rascal was poisoned by his second wife,” added Wadlow.

“I’m so glad to hear you say so,” said the laughing lady. “You men are so apt to stand up for one another through thick and thin, against the women you wrong.”

They smiled and shrugged their shoulders in depreciation of the charge, and each was about to say something, for the purpose of keeping up the ball of conversation, when “Carrie” (for so she may be provisionally called) glanced at a little jeweled watch which was conspicuously stuck in her waist belt. “Dear me—it’s three o’clock, and we must be off.”

“Without delay,” added ‘Mandy.’

Both stepped lightly toward the dark spiral staircase. The gentlemen removed their hats as the ladies disappeared from view, inclining their heads in recognition of the courtesy. It seemed an abrupt and stiff termination of a chat singularly free and unconventional. But Meldrum and Wadlow

new their countrywomen too well to be surprised. They were perfectly aware that American ladies are adepts in the difficult art of discouraging presumption founded upon their kind-heartedness and affability. Nothing in what had happened warranted them in thinking that the same ladies would condescend to recognize them at any subsequent meeting which the Fates might provide. Their departure from the gloomy chamber,—or cell it might be more fitly termed—was like the retirement of sunshine, so truly had they irradiated it with youth and beauty. But the missing brightness, in Wadlow's opinion, belonged to the "Mandy" whose surname he would have given something to know; while Meldrum thought only of the archness that exhaled incessantly from the "Carrie"—Carrie what?

Both gentlemen thrust their heads out of the deep embrasure, as if for the purpose of scrutinizing objects beneath, but really to see the ladies as they left the grounds. Their wish was gratified. A minute later an open landau, which had been standing at the main entrance, received the fair strangers. A person looking like a maid-in-waiting, and bearing shawls, seated herself on the back seat, and another person whose managerial deportment proclaimed him courier, deposited himself alongside of the coachman, and the vehicle rolled away.

Having seen all of Kenilworth that they desired, Meldrum, in his capacity of paymaster, bestowed a largess on Flib, and then they sauntered back to the inn where they had lunched. As they approached it they saw the open landau drawn up before the door. Servants were stowing away hand luggage in the roomy interior and under the coachman's seat. This was done with great rapidity and, when completed, the carriage dashed off again.

Here, then, it was possible to find out the names and even the destination of the fair unknowns. And within five minutes Meldrum had plied his shillings with such effect that he discovered the arch lady's name to be Mrs. Josiah J. Greatfield, and that her companion was a Miss Robison, and that they were destined to Coventry. It required the co-operation of several postboys and waiters to piece out the scanty facts. Among them they had observed the cards and tags attached to the bags and parcels—the absence of a register in the English inns not giving the information so easily obtainable at American hotels.

“Mrs. Josiah J. Greatfield! Where, oh where have I heard that name?” and Meldrum knit his brows with much earnestness, and then tapped them as if to dislodge a reminiscence which was accidentally obstructed there. “Ah! I have

now. She is the rich widow of the great Minneapolis mill owner—”

“Yes, I remember,” said Wadlow—“proprietor of the Balloon brand of family flour. He left her four stone mills, with a daily capacity of five thousand barrels and clear profits of a million a year. I was reading the figures in an American paper the other day.”

“Now I recall everything,” broke in Meldrum. “As a rich American widow, she has been hounded by beggarly counts and barons in all the Continental capitals. Her name has been mentioned in connection with a bankrupt English duke.”

“At all events, she is quite able to take care of herself,” suggested Wadlow.

“Undoubtedly; but 'tis a pity she should be bothered so by mere adventurers and fortune hunters.”

“Would you like to save her from them by marrying her yourself?” asked his friend, playfully.

“Heaven forbid!” was the laughing response of the inveterate bachelor. “I speak only as a Protectionist, favoring a Home Market for American widows and their fortunes.”

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Wadlow. “I've made a remarkable discovery, too. The other lady is a Miss Robison, you know. Prefix Amanda

(which is long for Mandy) to that, and what do we have?"

"Why, Amanda Robison, to be sure. What else could it be?"

"A great deal more," continued Wadlow, with enthusiasm. "We then have a name strangely suggestive of Amy Robsart. What with the brown hair and brown eyes, the creamy complexion, the slender curving neck and the green dress—is not the coincidence marvelous? Felix, my boy, we have seen to-day the heroine of Kenilworth."

"And, perhaps, of a new story of real life, with Mr. Madison Wadlow as the hero, ending more happily, let us hope, than the old one."

Wadlow laughed at the humor of the notion—his prepossessions for bachelorhood being almost as invincible as those of his friend.

Tennyson's dainty version of the Godiva legend had caused Coventry to be booked for a visit by the gentlemen, and the chance of meeting there Mrs. Josiah J. Greatfield and Miss Amanda Robison by no means tended to lessen the satisfaction with which they looked forward to their departure for that place by an early train next morning.

CHAPTER IX.

WITH TENNYSON AT COVENTRY.

“ Is infamous too strong an adjective to apply to it? Or shall I merely say disgraceful?”

The speaker was a middle-aged, wiry, nervous little man, whose face quivered with excitement.

He addressed his questions to Meldrum and Wadlow, who had been admiringly studying from various points of view the beautiful equestrian statue of Godiva in the Guildhall of Coventry. They had been so deeply absorbed in the contemplation of that pleasing work of art, that they had not observed the figure creeping up stealthily behind them, and now seizing upon the occasion to speak.

Thus accosted, they turned sharply and faced, as they supposed, a man who was urging his passionate protest against the nude in Art.

“ To me,” replied Meldrum, smiling at the fierceness of the questioner, “ it seems the embodiment of delicacy and purity.”

“ Tennyson’s very words, ‘clothed on with chastity,’ were in my mind as you spoke,” added

Wadlow, who shared in the amusement of his friend.

“Good heavens! What do you take me for?”

The word “crank” occurred to both of them; but, if they had uttered it, the epithet would have been lost in the sound of the stranger’s own voice, for without pausing for an answer, he declared in scornful accents:

“I am no miserable canting purist. For aught I care they might fill this hall with the statues of all the heathen goddesses ever dug up!”

“Then what is the matter?” asked Meldrum.

“What is the matter? Don’t you understand?” with a pitying smile at their obtuseness.

The friends good-naturedly shook their heads.

“That statue perpetuates a lie!” and he darted a look at it which the speaker evidently wished were a thunderbolt, that the odious marble might be shivered to atoms.

“Is that all?” asked Mr. Wadlow, innocently.

“‘Is that all?’ Did I hear aright?” And before giving Wadlow time to remark that his ears had not deceived him, the heated stranger continued his passionate interrogations without a moment’s pause for any reply.

“Are men forever to be the dupes of myth-makers? Are the noblest names to be handed down to eternal infamy? Is Leofric, Earl of Mur-

cia, to remain the object of execration and ridicule to the end of time because some lying fellow, two centuries after his death, accused him of an act of heartless and incredible cruelty to his wife?"

"A descendant of the Earl, I presume," said Meldrum, pulling as serious a face as was possible.

If the stranger had not been a deadly earnest person, constitutionally incapable of making or taking a joke, he would have questioned the sincerity of this remark. But he accepted it in good faith.

"No. I am only a champion of historical truth. I am here in a spirit of pure disinterestedness to vindicate the blackened character of one of the best Englishmen of the eleventh century."

"Rehabilitating you call it, I think," said Wadlow. "We call it whitewashing in America. At different times the operation has been applied, I remember, to Judas Iscariot, Richard the Third, and Lucrecia Borgia. But what proof have you that the grim earl of Tennyson's poem did not require his wife to ride naked through the town as a condition of repealing a tax under which his people were starving to death? I am a lawyer, you see."

The stranger cooled down a little. "Well," he said, with some hesitation, "no proof as yet to go before a stupid jury with. But I hope to find it here on the ground among the worm-eaten and

illegible parchments that may still be preserved in the archives of this Guildhall. I am an expert in the art of piecing together and deciphering such fragmentary records. But if I cannot secure legal evidence to refute the preposterous legend, the moral evidence yet remains overwhelming to every unprejudiced mind."

"What is it?" asked Meldrum, not yet bored to the last point of endurance.

"For one thing, Leofric, Earl of Murcia, founded a great monastery. That is a fact resting on authority older than the ridiculous myth we are discussing. Now I maintain that a man who is Christian enough to establish a monastery would not tax his people till they starved to death; still less would he make his wife ride through the streets in the condition you see there," pointing to the lovely simulacrum.

"But bad men have founded monasteries," interrupted Wadlow. "They have done it on their deathbeds to expiate the crimes of a life-time."

"Waive that point then for the present," said the stranger. "Look at the intrinsic incredibility of the fable."

"You refer, of course, to the blindness that was visited upon Peeping Tom," remarked Meldrum.

"Yes; that implies the intervention of a supernatural power, with no adequate occasion for it,

which I naturally deny. But I was not thinking of that," pursued the fierce little man, with the faintest semblance of a smile, and he cocked his eye knowingly.

"Of what, then?"

"Well, you know human nature (in a tone as near levity as his chronic grimness would permit). Take my word for it. There were fifty Peeping Toms if there was one of 'em. Why was only one of the fifty struck blind, eh? 'If you would have your tale seem true, keep probability in view,' says the poct."

Meldrum and Wadlow laughed at the novelty of the argument, the force of which they were not prepared to deny.

"You can't crack that nut anyhow. *Falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus*, you know. And so the myth goes to pieces."

The friends vouchsafing no response, because they were desirous of closing the conversation, the champion of the late Leofric of pious memory took his departure precipitately with a victorious and elated air.

Left to themselves, Meldrum and Wadlow resumed their inspection of the statuary with unabated interest. The casual observer (but there was none now that the nervous little man had fled the scene) would have supposed them to

be either sculptors or art critics or merchandize appraisers, so determined did they seem to get at the precise value of the *Godiva*, either in art or money. Whereas, they were only striving to fix the peerless image so tenaciously in their minds that they would be able to call it up at will at high noon in the crowded streets of modern Coventry.

They had visited the city of the "three tall spires" in order to subject themselves anew to the spell of the enchanter Tennyson, who had shaped a rough legend into a poem of the most delicate and refined beauty, every line of which is a separate picture. As at Kenilworth, now at Coventry, they sought to recreate the spectacle, the fame of which had been identified with the place by a magician in words.

Emerging upon the thronged thoroughfares, they found the environments unfavorable for the prosecution of the work. The number of people scurrying to and fro were a minor cause of disturbance. What chiefly hindered the free play of their fancy was the extremely modern architecture of the buildings. They desired a projecting story, or a gable, or a lozenge-shaped window, or a gargoyle upon and about which the ivy of their imagination might throw a tendril. Practiced as they were in the art of making believe, the feat sometimes required a little extraneous assistance.

"Here's the street we want," said Meldrum, preceding his friend into a narrow way where there were houses many centuries old, with white plastered bodies and black ribs, looking as if they had been built all right and then turned inside out, top-heavy, leaning toward one another from opposite side-walks, as if about to fall into the middle of the road in a mutual paralytic embrace. The little old windows of these little old houses were like eyes bleary and dim with age, but still trying to pry into the secrets of the other side of the street. As a spiritualist would say, the conditions were now more favorable. One could believe, in fault of any testimony to the contrary, that some of those "fantastic gables" might have "stared" at the sweet victim of Leofric's cruel jest, as she rode by, and that there were the same "wide-mouthed heads upon the spout" which "had cunning eyes to see" on that day memorable in the long annals of woman's exhaustless pity and goodness. The story ought to be true, if it is not, so adequately does it tell of her divine capacity for suffering when her sympathy is touched.

If heads had not been protruded from windows, if coatless apprentices had not been idling in doorways, if people had not been moving thickly to and fro on business or pleasure, the task which the

friends had proposed to themselves might, as has been intimated, have been more easily performed. But so trained had they become in the art of making inward conceptions palpable to the outward vision, so immersed were they in the realization of the ideal, that they soon succeeded in clearing the narrow street of all impediments to their day-dreams. They trod it alone, the palfrey with its precious load of charms all unveiled stepping by their side with noiseless footfalls. The horse, being necessarily patterned after the marble in Guildhall, was snow-white; and so, for the same reason, was the rider. To have warmed her into flesh and blood by the glow of a lambent imagination would have been more satisfactory. But the conditions under which the spectacle was conjured up would not allow of this improvement on the model. Its spotless purity seemed more consonant with the lofty conception of the poet than if it had been suffused with nature's own life-tints borrowed from the palette of a Raphael. And then, if the friends had been privileged to break away from their restrictions and to see Godiva as that "one low churl compact of thankless earth" saw her, in her own beauty unadorned, thereby condemning himself to be not only stone blind, but "the fatal by-word of all years to come," they would have felt like Peeping Toms themselves, and blushed at their own treachery and baseness. So intent

were they in the accomplishment of their work, at once scientific and pleasurable, that they did not remark how curiously they were scrutinized by the passers-by, and were unroused from their reveries even by the jostle of passing elbows. If the good people of Coventry who saw those singular strangers, gazing without apparent motive into the middle of the street at right angles to themselves, could have seen what they saw, they would have deemed the sight much superior to the elaborate pageant of their yearly celebration of the city's ancient legend with a circus rider from London to personate the modest and devoted Godiva.

That rousing shock which the worthy burghers of Coventry could not give the two dreamers from America, was supplied sharply enough by the modern houses lining both sides of a wide street into which they presently came. In the presence of fronts, all undeniably nineteenth century, the lovely phantom of the eleventh could not long survive. Presto! it vanished, and Meldrum and Wadlow saw in its stead the vulgar drays and butcher carts of the period.

Wrapped in their self-communings they had not exchanged a word till now, when they mutually expressed their contentment with the success of a trial about which, owing to its peculiar difficulties, they had entertained some misgivings.

The dear Godiva gone, it was not surprising that the charms of women in general should remain for a time uppermost in their thoughts, or that their meditations should be associated with tender remembrances of Mrs. Josiah J. Greatfield and Miss Amanda Robison.

“Now for the bridge, Madison,” said Meldrum, “Tennyson’s own point of view, you know.”

“And the likeliest place for meeting the sprightly widow and Amy—I mean Miss Robison,” replied Wadlow, supplementing the thought which he well knew was seething under his comrade’s Derby hat.

Meldrum laughed gently. “True. No tourist who comes to Coventry misses the bridge. By hanging round it with the ‘grooms and porters’ as Tennyson did, your wish may be gratified.”

“And yours, Felix, you can’t deny it,” said Wadlow, playfully.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. GREATFIELD'S VIEWS ABOUT LADY GODIVA AND OTHER MATTERS.

FOR use in landscape painting and poetry, a bridge should be, if possible, a single graceful arch. Make this arch high and crowning ; twine its buttresses with ivy ; glass it in a slow running stream, whose banks are fringed with grasses and wild flowers and overhung with trailing willows, and nor pen nor brush can find in this wide world a fairer object for its exercise. Until one has stood on the bridge near the railway station at Coventry, he cannot imagine how far it is possible for such an object to lack every element of picturesqueness which should adhere by right to a structure of the class. It is the barest apology for a viaduct spanning, not a river, nor a ravine, but only a shining gridiron of tracks along which trains are incessantly darting and belching smoke and soot into the faces of those who lean over its stony parapets. If wrought of iron with a slight rise to the center, it might, despite modernness, be not wholly devoid of that beauty for which one looks in a bridge that has the honor of being

embalmed in a poem by Tennyson. But it is as flat, formless, ugly, and strictly useful a work as pinching economy could provide, for the sole ends of clearing the stacks of the locomotives and permitting vehicles to cross it in safety. Tennyson may count it among the triumphs of his versatile genius that his "Godiva" draws pilgrims every day to the height of that hideous utility, not to kill time with the lounging grooms and porters, but to murmur to the circumambient air the old haunting lines.

Meldrum and Wadlow were thinking less of dead and gone Godivas than of draped living loveliness as they hung on the bridge alone, that sunny afternoon. So intently were they engaged in reviving the latent mental images of the countrywomen they had met at Kenilworth that they at first suspected the genuineness of those ladies, when they actually appeared descending from a carriage at the station and slowly walking up the slope to the bridge. They rubbed their eyes to assure themselves that those two symmetrical forms and handsome faces were not as unsubstantial as the lovely countess herself from whom they had so lately parted. No! on a second glance, the vitality of the persons approaching was not to be mistaken. That solidity, that exuberance of the widow, that fragility and springiness of the maiden, were no mere figments of the brain. And there was no possible room for

doubt, when a gleam of recognition brightened the eyes and flushed the cheeks of both ladies, as their upward glance met that of the gallant fellows, who removed their hats and bowed respectfully, advancing at the same time to greet the newcomers.

The widow bore the full sunlight of a rare English day very well. The half-gloom of Mervyn's tower is favorable to dubious complexions, and those experts in the texture of ladies' cheeks who had seen her the day before in that partial revelation were prepared to note a shade of sallowness detracting from the healthy purity of the flesh tones they had admired so much. Uncreased, a delicate confusion of red and white, the face that beamed upon them proclaimed the underside of thirty. In her large blue eyes there was a baby simplicity, well calculated to beguile the unwary. The light short tendrils clustering over her round forehead lent her the appearance of a bright, handsome boy, masquerading in female attire, than which nothing is more roguish and effective—and the widow knew it.

That day she was the incarnation of archness and raillery, and the two friends saw some fun before them. Miss Amanda Robison, while perfectly charming, did not entirely fill the part of Amy Robsart at this second meeting. It was not so much that her green dress had been exchanged for a brown, which matched her hair and eyes, as that

her age seemed to have been raised over night from eighteen to twenty-one—two—three—four—or five,—Meldrum and Wadlow being incompetent to guess which. But they were rather pleased than otherwise to superadd a few years as a ripener of immaturity. Eighteen seems too young for a heroine in real life, and one may honestly doubt if the Countess of Leicester could have shown the courage and self-possession with which she is credited at that age.

The widow was brimming with mischief. “Aren’t we all silly to climb up to this dirty old bridge, just because Tennyson lugged it into that poetry about Godiva. Ha, ha !”

“It is sentiment,” said Meldrum; as if that were an all-sufficient reason for the folly. Wadlow corroborated the opinion with a nod and smile, and so did Miss Robison.

“You all did it to please yourselves, but I did it to please *her*,” and the widow assumed a comic air of great self-sacrifice. “You’ll think it bad taste, I dare say, but oh, how I do hate that Godiva !” and she confirmed the assertion of the mortal antipathy by a prolonged giggle.

“Why, pray ?” asked Meldrum.

“Why, because she was such a poor, weak little fool,—just like so many other women (and the widow knit her white brow very prettily to imply

that she herself was a creature of much sterner stuff). The idea of riding horseback through the streets in broad daylight as—as—she did,—and in this raw air (the widow shivered sympathetically as she spoke), just to satisfy the whim of that brute of a husband. It's horrible!"

"But if she had refused," said Wadlow, gently, "he would have kept on the tax and let his people starve."

"Not if she had had a true woman's spunk," retorted the widow. "Of course, being a bully, he was a coward. If I'd been in her place that circus never would have come off. I'd have forced him to repeal the tax and apologize to me for his impudence." (She enunciated this with a positiveness that seemed to be born of some experience in defying and taming just such brutes.)

"How?" asked Meldrum, curious to know her method of subjugating tyrants.

"By going home to my mother. That never fails. Ha, ha!" This with an apparent air of conviction as if based upon some actual test in her private history.

"True, true. I think he would have come after you early next day,—I mean Godiva, and begged your—that is her—pardon and repealed the tax. But, fond as he was of his dogs and hunting and other coarse pleasures, he might have let

her go and doubled the tax out of spite. What then?"

"What then?" exclaimed the widow. "If I had been fond enough of the people here to do what that Godiva did—ugh! it makes me creepy to think of it (and she mechanically hugged herself in her light traveling shawl as if for warmth), I'd have come back from my mother's on the sly. Then I'd have taken refuge with some faithful old retainer,—the old retainers were always faithful in those times, you know,—I'd have disguised myself as a page and got the free run of the castle. Watching my chance, I'd have put a good stiff dose of poison into the goblet which he quaffed, ha, ha! Then, when the miserable wretch was dead, I'd have thrown off my disguise and reigned in his stead," and the widow nearly choked herself with laughing.

"Carrie, how can you talk in that dreadful way. It would be murder," said Miss Robison.

"With every respect for your opinion," blandly interposed Wadlow, who with professional instinct had rapidly sketched out a good legal defense for Godiva in the supposititious case, "had she been my client, we could have made it out emotional insanity."

"Just so," said the widow. "'Served him right' would have been the verdict of any sensible jury."

"Would you have had no remorse, Carrie?" asked her companion, reproachfully.

"Not a bit of it. Why, the temperature here must be below sixty-five, in the warmest weather, too. The idea of making a poor woman ride horseback without even a chest protector, a day like this, for example. Poisoning was too good for him. I would have chopped him up fine with a hatchet afterward and gloried in the deed. Ha, ha!" Here the widow was again convulsed with merriment.

Recovering herself, she changed the subject with her usual suddenness.

"What they most want in Coventry, now, is a first-class fireproof hotel, with an elevator and all the modern improvements like the—"

"Like 'The Ryan,' of St. Paul," interjected Miss Robison, mischievously. "But then it is twice too large for a place like this."

"Big as it is, you could put it inside of 'The West,' of Minneapolis, and you know it, Mandy."

"I remember that your Minneapolis *Meteor* made that absurd statement," retorted Miss Robison, a little more seriously, for they were broaching a topic which divides and maddens the inhabitants of the twin cities. "But the St. Paul *Comet* showed up the figures next day. Everybody knows that 'The Ryan'—"

Wadlow, mindful of the exciting discussion as to the comparative claims of the rival cities, which they had overheard and been asked to participate in the previous day, deemed it politic to call off the fair disputants from so dangerous a theme. Therefore, at the risk of being thought rude, he interfered with the remark: "The three tall spires are seen to great advantage from this point, aren't they?" (The observation was particularly addressed to Miss Robison.)

"Quite so," replied that lady. "That one (pointing to the lofty steeple of St. Michaels) must be almost as high as St. Ethelfrida's at home."

"I will say," remarked the widow, as if making a concession to smooth away any unpleasantness, "that Ethelfrida is a great credit to St. Paul. I suppose its spire is not twenty feet short of our Holy Evangel's."

"How kind of you Carrie, really," replied Miss Robison, with veiled sarcasm in her tone. "Perhaps you will next allow that Ethelfrida is almost as fashionable as the Evangel."

"Yes, I would—for peace, dear."

"How good you are." Then, abandoning the ironical vein, Miss Robison made a direct thrust. "You don't have half as many carriages in livery before your church doors, Sundays, as we do."

"Very true, if you count those your people hire

for the occasion, ha, ha! By the way, dear, how much salary do you pay Dr. Butterwick?"

"Ten thousand a year," returned Miss Robison, incautiously stating the precise sum as she remembered it.

"We give our rector twelve—and a house to live in. That settles it, I should say;" and the archest of widows curved her expressive eyebrows at her male auditors, who could make no further response than to show their teeth in a fatuous and helpless way.

In sheer desperation, Meldrum made another essay to divert the stream of talk into some safer channel. Grasping at the first idea that occurred to him, he impulsively remarked: "Coventry has very much to interest the tourist, but it lacks one thing besides a first-class hotel." He was about to add "a castle," but Mrs. Greatfield headed him off.

"What it needs is a flour mill built of stone ten stories high. Thousands of people come to Minneapolis to see ours. But then, poor things, they have no St. Anthony's Falls here for the water-power."

The bachelors were now listening greedily, in hope that the garrulous little widow would add to their scanty stock of information already afforded by the press as to her colossal fortune; for there is something about an enormously rich widow to

which no man, not already mated, can be wholly indifferent. It is impossible for such a man to avoid the reflection that she may lose all her property through inexperience and blind confidence, when it might be saved for her by a second husband in the capacity of a hard-headed adviser and trusted friend.

But any disclosures she might have been about to make of her pecuniary affairs were excluded by a remark from Miss Robison.

"At all events, Carrie, Coventry is spared an ugly piece of architecture."

"Not as ugly as your Opera House," retorted the widow gaily, and again the bachelors were all attention. For, much as a widow with highly productive flour mills might appeal to their manly compassion, a helpless maiden with an opera house on her hands became an object of even greater solicitude. But it was decreed that no further light should be cast on this matter then and there, for the stroke of the clock reminded Mrs. Greatfield that the Northern express was due in five minutes.

"Not a minute to lose!" she exclaimed, and with a parting inclination of the head, provokingly distant and cold when contrasted with her recent affability, the widow faced right about and walked rapidly toward the station, followed with equal alacrity by Miss Robison, who merely maintained,

at parting with her fellow countrymen, the same reserve she had hitherto shown them. As the bachelors looked down from their eminence at the railway platform, they could see the well-remembered courier and maid standing guard over a heap of traveling bags and wraps, so that there was no valid excuse for running after the ladies to proffer their services. Till the gloomy station swallowed them up, they kept their backs obdurately turned toward the spectators on the bridge, who both foolishly thought that by dint of hard wishing such magnetic power might be exerted upon the shapely figures thus presented in reverse, as to compel them to turn and grant one last look.

The Northern express drew up to the platform ; the ladies reappeared ; they entered a first-class carriage ; the engine wheezed and the train rumbled ; and the ardent watchers were experiencing a sharp pang of disappointment, when, at a curve of the road, they saw two faces at the open windows and received two indisputable smiles, which were repaid in kind from the bridge with every gesture of respect of which hands and hats are capable.

Would they ever see the ladies again ?

That is a question that occurred with much force to Meldrum and Wadlow.

CHAPTER XI.

WITH GRAY AT STOKE POGIS.

BOTH Meldrum and Wadlow had looked forward with the keenest anticipations of pleasure to visiting the scene of Gray's pathetic Elegy. A kindred taste for the sweet and sad, when deftly commingled in perfectly finished verse, made them equally familiar with that poem. Musical, delicious lines from it rose unbidden to their memory less often in passing graveyards, or at the sight of funeral processions, than amid the throng of Broadway, the whirl of Wall Street, the frivolous social pleasures of which they partook. The idea furthest possible from their thoughts, as they repeated bits of the Elegy aloud or to themselves, was that of death or the vanity of human wishes. They drew from it no personal lesson whatever. Happily exempt from any recent, keen bereavement or the bitter consciousness of failure in life, they did not resort to it for consolation. It was their good fortune to enjoy it for its intrinsic sweetness and beauty, its fidelity to the night side of nature, its all-embracing humanity. The melancholy which is its broad under-

tone was to them but the tender gray of one of Corot's pictures, or the plaintive minors of a nocturne by Chopin--something to be gratefully accepted without searching analysis. Driven to book, the friends could not have give one reason for doting on the Elegy that would have satisfied preacher or moralist. And yet they had planned to testify their profound love of Gray's Elegy by an act from which the severest of homilists might well have recoiled. They proposed to spend a few hours in Stoke Pogis church-yard, after dark.

Their immediate point of departure for the old burial ground was Slough. They had run down from London and put up at "The Green Man" for supper. They had fortified themselves for the walk to Stoke Pogis--about four miles--by a solid meal. On its completion they asked the obliging landlord some questions about the road, explaining to him the object of their projected excursion. He was astonished to learn that two men who did not appear to be escaped lunatics should propose to spend part of a dark cold night (for such was the outlook to the weatherwise) in a graveyard, of all places.

"In coarse it ain't none o' my business, but, if I might wenter to adwise a body, I'd say stop 'ere an' be quite comfortable-like to-night an' go over to Stoke Pogis in the mornin'."

Meldrum, as spokesman, curtly said "No." The landlord knew he meant it.

"Very well. No offense meant. You knows best. I takes it you'll want a carriage, or leastways a guide."

Meldrum wasted not even a monosyllable but shook his head determinedly.

"Mebbe you'd like a little 'amper o' cold chicken an' 'am; an' I begs parding for mentionin' brandy —to keep off the roometiz, which is partickly catchin' in graveyards after dark."

"Quite true," was the gratifying response. "Put up a pint of it."

The landlord hurried off to execute a commission which enabled him to make something extra out of his eccentric guests, and presently returned with a bottle labeled "Fine Old Brandy, 1850."

Meldrum pocketed the flask, paid the score and, with a glance at the setting sun, remarked, "It's getting late, and we must be off. Don't sit up for us. Ta, ta!"

"I wish you good luck, gents, both. But it's a mighty queer place to make a night of it—a graveyard is."

The three laughed together at the oddity of the conceit, the truth of which was not to be denied, and the Americans turned to leave, when a sudden thought struck Meldrum.

"I've one favor to ask of 'The Green Man.'"

"Wich I shall be most 'appy to grant it," answered the representative of that hostelry. "Wot s the same?"

"Only this—that the 'Green Man' shall hang out a picture of himself—a signboard, you know. I vant to see what a green man looks like."

"It's sing'ler I've never seen none," said the landord, reflectively. "There's plenty o' signs with picers of Blue Boars, and White Lions, and Golden Swans, an' sich like as never existed. Why not a Green Man, too? But 'old a minute. Should the man hisself be green, or would you only put him in green cloze?"

"Both, undoubtedly. He should be dressed in a uit, say, of Lincoln green, with shoes of bottle green, hat of pea green and feather of the same, face and hands of olive green, hair, beard, and eyes pple green. Nobody could possibly mistake that ort of a man for anything but a Green Man," said Vadlow, taking up the notion and letting it run away with him.

"Sutonly not," replied the landlord, with a look of elation. "See 'cre. I'll get Goslin, the painter an' glazier, to do the job on a board. He can make it old-like, by rubbin' in ashes an' dirt enough. Then he shall put on thirteen hundred an' fifty in ggers, for the year when this 'ouse was built. It

looks almost that age (glancing fondly at the battered structure, which had a spinal depression in the ridgepole peculiar to many old buildings). Would that draw you Americans, d'ye think?"

"No doubt of it whatever," said Meldrum. "But Heaven forbid, that we should advise such a fraud. And Mr. Landlord," he continued, with mock gravity, "I am very much surprised to hear you propose it. One would think you'd had some experience in making old things out of new—for instance, 1850 brandy" (caressing the bulging bottle that dangled in his coat tail).

The landlord had evidently looked for a compliment to his cleverness in catering to American tastes, and was not prepared for this bantering allusion to his fine old home-made liquors. While he was scratching his head in some confusion for an answer equal to the emergency, the friends set forth with long strides for the vanquishment of the four miles to Stoke Pogis.

The outlines of all objects were softened in the long English twilight, as they left the green confines of a high-hedged lane, and passed through a turnstile into the narrow path which gives pedestrians their short cut into Stoke Pogis church-yard. Climbing up a little embankment, they gained their first view of the church whose ivy-mantled tower still keeps watch and ward over the sleepers in its

shadow. To look at it in its reality after a long familiarity with its outlines in engravings illustrative of the Elegy, was like seeing again, after many years' absence, the country church of one's youth.

"It looks natural," they simultaneously exclaimed, as if they were revisiting it after a prolonged residence in America. "The church-yard is certainly unchanged," said Wadlow, unconsciously referring to the pictures of it he carried securely in his mind.

"I should have said a big yew tree used to stand about here," said Meldrum, with the same pictures as mental guides. "Died of old age, I suppose."

With many such remarks, showing how carefully they had prepared themselves for the occasion, they strolled down the central graveled walk between the heaving turf and moldering heaps which alone mark the resting-place of the nameless rude forefathers of the hamlet. Reserving these for later inspection by such a diminished light as Gray requires, they hastened to accost a person, who was in the act of locking up the old church for the night. He was a thin little man, almost doubled up with years, and yet having so much seeming toughness in his very infirmities that many a healthy middle-aged man might have been glad to exchange chances of longevity with him.

Meldrum, after bidding this living companion of

the Stoke Pogis dead, "Good-evening," came to the point with a sixpence and a request to see the inside of the church in which Gray himself is said to have worshiped occasionally.

"Which was his (meaning the poet's) pew?" he asked of the guide, who obsequiously preceded him.

The little old man hobbled up the aisle in the deepening gloom, and paused in front of a large inclosed space, over the high wooden walls of which one could hardly look save on tip-toe. Opening a door, he pointed into what was virtually a room, nicely carpeted and cushioned, and further blessed with a stove, alongside of which was piled wood for fuel. The occupants of this pew would be so completely screened from impertinent observation that they could sleep undetected—barring snores—through tedious sermons,—a great privilege.

"So this was his pew," said Wadlow, treasuring up its aspect in a comprehensive glance.

"Yes, sir. He sat there," pointing to an enormous arm-chair, luxuriously padded in the back, as if to facilitate naps. "It has been draped in mournin'. We took it off only last week."

"So the mourning was kept on for over a hundred years," remarked Meldrum. "I did not suppose that Gray was held in such respect even here."

The puzzled look of the aged servitor gave way

o mirth. "O, I see, you mean the man wot wrote them lines about the grave-yard out there. Bein' a poet, I s'pose he never come to church. I knows a poet now that's allers mousin' round here except when there's service goin' on. He's what he parson calls a nobstick."

"Ah, an agnostic," said Meldrum, laughing.

"This 'ere pew," resumed the guide, assuming his most important air, "has belonged for two hundred years to Sir Thomas Crickenback."

"Who has but lately died in his two hundredth year?"

"Bless you, no! There has been nine Sir Thomases in all that time. The eighth one we buried in this 'ere vault two months ago," and the old man pointed with a lean, trembling forefinger to an iron ring in the stone floor, and stamped with his feeble feet, producing a sepulchral echo. "Their ladies and children is stowed away down there with 'em. If they dont stop bein' born or dyin' we shall some day have to build either a new vault or a new church or both for 'em."

There is no telling when the garrulous old fellow would have relinquished his favorite topic, had not Meldrum called him off by the exhibition of another bit of silver, coupled with the petition that he might have the loan of the church door key till morning; giving as the reason, that they had a

whimsical fancy to hear the hooting of the owl in the old tower, and it would be pleasanter for them to stay in the church till the bird began his performances than to wait outside in the cold, and Meldrum significantly nodded into the cosy depths of the Crickenback pew.

“Anybody can see you are real gents,” said the guide, looking stealthily at the white coin in his hand. “You may have the key and stay in here as long as you like. Only, when you do go away you must slip it under the first flat gravestone to the right of the door. But there ain’t no owl in the tower now as I’ve heerd of.”

This news was a shock to men who had taken the continuous residence of a lineally descended owl in the tower for granted, as well as the rugged elms, the yew tree’s shade and the other unchanging properties of the hallowed place.

They had staked much of their happiness at Stoke Pogis on the complaint of the owl to the moon when she should observe them wandering near her secret bower and molesting her ancient solitary reign.

“Ter-whit—ter-who—ter-who—ter-whit,” sounded immediately in their rear.

The friends gave a nervous start at this most unexpected and welcome of interruptions. But the old man laughed very composedly and said, “it’s

y rogue of a grandson, Jo. He's been overhearin' 'em."

As he spoke, a roughly clad, dirty-faced urchin peared from behind a pillar where he had been ding. Unabashed, he advanced to the Ameri-ns, and placing his arms akimbo, said—"I'm your owl for a shillin' an hour."

"He takes off all kind o' birds wonderful," ex-
plained the grandfather, with unconcealed delight,
as he saw how artfully the child was bidding for the
ranger's coins. It was a proud moment for the
old man.

The absurdity of the proposal made the darkening church ring with laughter, to which was joined brilliant peal of ter-whits ter-whos, from the raceless Jo, as free samples of what they might expect at a shilling an hour.

"It's a bargain," said Meldrum, when he had finally sobered down to business and the requirements of the sacred edifice. "Here's for the first hour in advance. You go up into the tower and 'oot every five minutes, beginning at eight o'clock. That's curfew, I believe?"

"Curfoo!" echoed the old man. "I dunno it."

"It tolls the knell of parting day and all that sort of thing—first line of the Elegy, you know."

The word "tolls" carried with it an association of ideas which the obsolete word "curfew" had not

raised. "You can hear the Eton clock strike from here, when the wind sets this way, if that's wot you want."

"All right. Its sound, with that of the bogus owl, will keep us company in our lonely watch."

"If you are meanin' to stay out there in the grave-yard, you may have more company than you likes," said the guide, sinking his voice to a hoarse whisper. "I've heerd how that sometimes the ghost of the poet Gray comes and sits on his own tomb. It's the plain one nearest the church. You'll know it by the name carved on top."

"A ghost!" cried Meldrum. "How delightful, if he should show up; but then he will keep us waiting till midnight."

"The time would be well spent watching for him," said Wadlow.

Grandfather looked aghast at men capable of such levity and audacity, and then relapsing into a friendly interest as he jingled the silver tips in his pocket, he again assured them that they were heartily welcome to quarter in the church all night if they wished.

CHAPTER XII.

IGHT SCENES AND THOUGHTS IN A CHURCH-YARD.

BUT little light now struggled through the deeply tained windows, as the party issued from the building. The feeble old fellow bade the Americans good-night and wished them good luck, as he limped out of the church-yard and along the well-rodden foot path that led to his humble cottage in the distance. Jo climbed by the corkscrew staircase to the tower, where he abided the Eton stroke of eight to fulfill his lucrative engagement as owl. Teldrum and Waldon strolled off among the graves, noticing with pleasure how nature was conspiring to further the object of their presence at Stoke Pogis. The evening was windless and not too cold for comfort. The landscape was beginning to fade on the sight and the air held a solemn stillness. They found the brick and stone tomb which contains the ashes of the beloved poet, and thanked him mentally for the pure delight he had given to their whole lives by his Elegy, and in advance for the refined enjoyment insured them by the approaching darkness. Before the night shut

in, they hastened to decipher some of the names spelt by the unlettered muse upon moss-grown, toppling stones, and the accompanying holy text made almost illegible by lichens, which yielded only to the vicious digs of a jackknife. The unwonted stooping gave them cramps in the small of the back, and they threw themselves for a moment's respite on the soft lush grass between two little billows of earth unmarked by any stone. Sustaining heads on crooked elbows, they reached out and idly plucked daisies that grew profusely about and chewed the stems, a process highly conducive to meditation for reasons that Herbert Spencer could doubtless give, if he would condescend to philosophize about so small a matter.

To them, ruminating, happy, and silent, came at length the slow sweet stroke of eight, borne over miles of dewy-scented fields from Eton College. It was the curfew without the name. Promptly, as by contract, sounded the counterfeit "ter-whit ter-who, ter-who ter-wit," from the ivy-mantled tower. The fidelity of the tones to those of the feathered original, which the friends had often heard in the country days of their childhood, was perfect. Only a slight tag of laughter betrayed to those who were in the secret the human source of the notes.

"Capital!" said Meldrum. "Now, if there were only a moon to which the moping owl might be

supposed to complain. But we can't have everything."

"True," added his comrade, in a complacent vein. "For example, there are no lowing herds audible as they wind slowly o'er the lea; and, if any drowsy tinklings lull the distant fold, they are too distant to be heard by us. The plowing season is over, and, therefore, no plowman can be expected to be plodding his weary way homeward at this or any other hour. I don't mind the loss of these things, but, as there must be beetles about at this time of the year, I would give something to hear just one wheel his droning flight." As Wadlow uttered this fervent desire, his hat was smartly hit by some flying insect, which caromed into space.

"Thank Heaven for so much assistance to the illusion!" And he laughingly removed his Derby, in the crown of which could be seen by the still lingering twilight a small dint made by the hard shell of a beetle.

The boom of coleoptera could now be distinctly heard, and occasionally the friends received other proofs of their activity in taps on the cheeks, and Meldrum gently disentangled one from his hair where it had alighted. "It is realistic, if not exactly pleasant," he declared.

"Of one thing I am fully persuaded," he con-

tinued, in a low voice. "Nature never meant that a healthy man should think much about death. All around me are reminders of the inevitable hour and of the grave to which the paths of glory lead, and yet the fate to which we must all succumb has not been in my thoughts for a single instant here."

"I can honestly say the same," observed Wadlow. "To be frank, I have tried to coax myself into some profitable reflections on death—such as seem appropriate to this place—but I can't do it. I am so far from seriousness and moralizing that I confess I was about to laugh as you spoke. A comical idea had struck me."

"Let me share it," said Meldrum. "I find that I cannot possibly help being in the facetious vein, too. It is Nature's healthy protest against useless dumps, I suppose."

The hooting of the hired owl cut into the conversation, and this time free from the concluding blemish which they had noticed at first.

"If he keeps it up like that," said Meldrum, "I'll throw in an extra shilling."

"I was thinking," resumed Wadlow, "how lucky for the world it is that the Milton, who here may rest, was mute and inglorious. Imagine two or more Miltos with a corresponding number of *Paradieses Lost* or their equivalents in ponderous epics

about heaven and hell. Consider that a pair of Miltons would have doubled the false pretenses of cultivated people. They would all have been obliged to affect a familiarity with one more undying poem which they had never read save in the winnowings of anthologies and as parsing lessons at school."

"Yes, indeed!" echoed Meldrum; "we will cheerfully admit Milton to be the greatest of English epic poets, and entitled to the immortality of uncut pages in the finest of bindings, and still rejoice that Nature did not duplicate that particular man with his precise qualifications for writing *Paradise Lost*. Why, much as I admire the genius of Byron, even two Byrons would have been a bore!"

Wadlow pursued the tempting theme. "What if somebody were buried here who might have scattered plenty o'er a smiling land, if his lonely lot had not forbade it; *per contra*, the world may have escaped, in the enforced obscurity or early death of somebody else, a tyrant who would have waded through slaughter to a throne and shut the gates of mercy on mankind. Two Miltons or two Byrons would be heartily welcomed by the universe when contrasted with two possible Napoleons scourging the human family into untimely graves to gratify their insatiate and remorseless pride and ambition."

"After all, Madison, is it true that any rage (in

the quaint phrasing of the poet) that is really noble, was ever repressed, or is the genial current of the soul actually frozen by chill penury? In America we should certainly scout that view of life as pusillanimous; and English literature, science, art, and politics abound in signal proofs of the triumph of undoubted genius over what Claude Melnotte calls 'low birth and iron fortune.' *Pace* the shade of Gray, it seems to me the one jarring note in his otherwise harmonious Elegy."

"Quite right, Felix. If in this neglected spot is laid a heart once pregnant with celestial fire, or a hand that the rod of empire might have swayed, depend upon it that the owner thereof persisted in willfully stifling or indolently neglecting his native gifts and keeping the noiseless tenor of his way along the cool, sequestered vale of life, instead of entering the race like a man for the prizes. He simply did not seize the opportunity that all men have, and the fact that he let it go by proves that he did not deserve the earthly rewards he missed. But he was just as happy without them."

Wadlow dropped into this closing truism with the same entire lack of belief in it that invariably underlies its utterance by youth and health.

"But this is no place nor time to criticise or disparage any bit of the tenderest and sweetest of poems," said Meldrum. "Rather let us thank

Thomas Gray for the exalted pleasure he has given to four generations of men by the Elegy."

"There's an enchanter for you!" added Wadlow. "In all England, perhaps, no church-yard less picturesque than this can be found. Tear up those few rugged elms by the roots, banish that yew tree's shade, and its scanty natural attractions are gone. There is not one grave here that a tourist would step aside to see, except that of Gray, and his is an interesting object only because he wrote the Elegy. Out of such unpromising materials genius has made the Mecca of cemeteries to which pilgrims will resort as long as the English language lasts. The clock strikes nine and here we sit—shivering in the cold and catching the rheumatism, because Gray chose to celebrate this particular church-yard in poetry."

"Ter-whit ter-who, ter-who ter-whit," hooted the owl, high and dry in his belfry, as if mocking the folly of the two sentimentalists down there in the damp grass.

"By a natural association of ideas," said Meldrum, "I do now remember the fine old brandy of 1850, which I had quite forgotten. Let us button up our overcoats and take a nip." Suiting the action to the word, he fastened his surtout about his chest to a mummy-like tightness (Wadlow following the example), and then produced from its deep re-

cess the neglected bottle. "The corkscrew, Madison."

Wadlow fumbled in several pockets for that treasure of a knife, which comprised, with six blades of different sizes, a corkscrew, a gimlet, an awl, and file, but, as usual in such emergencies, it had been left behind in the other trousers.

With experience born of many youthful picnics, Meldrum was about to clip off the neck of the flask with a dexterous blow of his walking stick, when his friend huskily whispered, "There's some one else in the church-yard. Look!" His right arm was extended toward Gray's tomb, the outline of which was visible at the distance of four or five rods. A figure, clad in an old-fashioned cloak reaching to the heels and wearing a large slouched hat, was taking a slow, measured tread which, the next moment, brought him to the tomb, whereon he seated himself and folded his arms, his head sinking on his breast. The action recalled to both observers Gray's own words, supposed to describe some of his chameleon-like moods: "Now drooping, woeful, wan, like one forlorn or crazed with care or crossed in hopeless love."

"If it were midnight, I should say that was Gray's ghost, of which we have been forewarned," whispered Meldrum, with a slight tremor, doubtless attributable to the chilliness.

"Wouldn't it be lucky if it were," responded Wadlow, in a tone that, somehow did not express unmixed pleasure.

"Ter-who ter-whit," cried the owl, and, at the first mournful note, the figure on the tomb threw up his head with a sharp, undignified jerk, and muttered some words inaudible to the strained ears of the two friends.

Slow, deliberate motions and absolute taciturnity (save when spoken to) have became so fully incorporated, by tradition, with the universal conception of a ghost, that the flesh and blood quality of the apparition was proclaimed at once, and furthermore confirmed by his hasty removal of his hat and persistent scratching of his head, like one trying to grub up latent ideas. Then he pulled a corner of the huge extinguisher over his eyes, refolded his arms and became motionless, though the listeners could still hear low, incoherent mutterings.

"He's wrapped in his own thoughts and will not notice our approach. Let's surprise him for fun," suggested Wadlow, and they thereupon concerted a little scheme to startle the man who was taking such liberties with Gray's tomb.

So, stealing off in different directions, bending low in the shadow of gravestones, crawling on all fours across open spaces, they succeeded in attaining points in the rear of their victim. Then closing in

with silent swiftness, till they stood almost within touch of him, they were about to utter the pre-concerted "boo," when a remark from the unconscious person caused a sudden change in their programme—

"Fowl, cowl, growl, howl—pshaw! how few good rhymes there are to owl!"

Wadlow's poetic instinct at once asserted itself. Instead of playing spook for the mystification of the heedless stranger, he found another rhyme on the instant from force of habit.

"How would jowl do?" he asked, in his ordinary voice.

"Or soul, if you pronounce it Irish fashion," added Meldrum, himself disarmed by the appeal to his old talent of rhyming which had been buried in a napkin these many years.

There is no telling what effect two vigorous "boos" might have produced upon that man sitting upon that tomb at that hour of the night; but he turned round quite calmly, and simply replied "Thank you," in a melancholy voice, and then stared at the dark forms near him as if awaiting some explanation.

"It's clear *you* don't believe in ghosts," said Meldrum, pleasantly.

"If I did I should not be here," and the friends could see a large mouth curved in a sad smile.

"No fear of robbers?" asked Wadlow, playfully.

"Not much," returned the deep chest voice.

"I am a poet and chronically cleaned out. I couldn't stand and deliver anything more valuable than a few sonnets—and the world doesn't love them overmuch." Here his tones became tomb-like.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MODERN ELEGIAC POET SEEKING INSPIRATION AT THE FOUNT.

"How do you happen to be here at this hour?" asked Meldrum, kindly, and yet with an unconcealable touch of proprietorship in the church-yard, as if his private engagement of the owl had somehow given him a monopoly of the place for self and friend.

"I often come here for inspiration," explained the man. "I seem to extract it from Gray's tomb merely by sitting on it."

Wadlow was on the point of saying "through the pores, I presume," but he forbore to make that unworthy remark.

"It is but natural, as elegiac poetry is my forte. And where should I come for ideas but to the fountain of Elegy?" rapping the stone with his knuckles, to indicate an inexhaustible well-spring beneath. "You are Americans, I know by your accent. It is barely possible that even in your distant country you may have heard of Hippledown?"

Meldrum's habitual politeness would not permit him to say "no," or even to shake his head. Casuists may condemn him as they will, but it is a fact that he nodded, and his voiceless affirmation was abetted by the too flexible Wadlow.

It was a cheap way of giving the melancholy stranger a great pleasure, which appeared in the sudden expansion of his lean face into a true smile, from which it promptly subsided into its normal gloom.

"Thank you! thank you! What you have both said (they had said nothing) goes far to solace me for the too habitual neglect of my own countrymen. It is not for me, perhaps, to assert that my heart is pregnant with celestial fire, or that I could wake to ecstasy the living lyre if I had the chance. It may be that others will say that of me too late, when I am laid away here," and he glanced significantly, almost yearningly, at a little unoccupied strip of ground that would have snugly fitted his attenuated frame. Then ensued a pause, which his hearers did not improve by the sympathetic remarks for which the poet was probably waiting.

"Ter-who ter-whit!"

"That's what brought me here to-night, gentlemen. I've lived, man and boy, in these parts for thirty years and never before have I heard an owl in that tower."

"And you thought an occurrence so extraordinary should be duly commemorated in a poem," said Meldrum.

"You have divined my purpose. Hearing the bird of night as I was walking home from Slough, the idea flashed upon me of celebrating the return of Gray's owl—I mean, of course, a descendant of the original one—to her secret bower. Acting promptly upon the happy thought, I sought the poet's tomb for the usual aid it affords me in composition."

"You were at work on the poem when we interrupted you?"

"I was, if work it may be called which is a pleasure. But so far from interrupting, you have helped me in suggesting two capital rhymes for owl, both of which are novel and available. I am roughly projecting a poem of from twelve to sixteen stanzas, with a rhyme for owl in each."

Both Meldrum and Wadlow expressed a curiosity to see the poem in print, and asked where and when it would probably appear.

"I don't know," answered Mr. Hippledown, bitterly. "There is a clique of shallow society poets in possession of all the magazines. So I cannot gain admission there. I used to be welcome to a corner of the county newspaper, but the editor now tells me that the public taste is inclining

more and more to light and flippant verses. There seems only one place left for a poet who deals with the solemnities of life. I am almost ashamed to name it."

"We should be pleased to know, if the disclosure does not wound you too deeply," said Wadlow, compassionately.

"Well, the obituary column. The editor assures me that room will always be found for my poetry on payment of the regular advertising rates."

"A hard condition, indeed," commented Meldrum.

"Hard as it is, the arrangement is the only one which pays me at all. It works like this: I have an elegiac trifle on hand. A man in the neighborhood loses his father, mother, wife, son, daughter, or any member of his family. I promptly call upon him and show him some verses which, with a little change to suit his particular bereavement, will express his feelings of sorrow. He buys them and prints them in the paper at his own expense and generally over his own signature."

"You make money, but no reputation out of it."

"And precious little cash." The poet heaved a sigh in which the two friends philanthropically joined.

"The lines you propose on the return of the long

missing owl to the scene of the Elegy are obviously unsuited to use in obituaries," remarked Meldrum.

"Yes, I shall reserve them, with many another elaborate production of my muse, to some happy day, when the public tires of folly in rhyme and bids its poets discourse of the gravest issues of life and death. Then will come my turn and with it my book."

Mr. Hippledown's profound chest voice rose several notes in the scale as he uttered this cheerful prophecy and found his evident consolation in it.

During this conversation the Americans had familiarly seated themselves on the flat top of Gray's tomb, on either side of their new acquaintance. It comfortably accommodated all three. But the cold touch of the marble, combined with the increasing frigidity of the atmosphere as the night drew on, struck a chill to the bones of two of the sitters, unaccustomed as they were to such exposure. Meldrum thought it high time to take the postponed "nip," as an infallible prescription against rheumatism.

"Permit me to consult you on a delicate question of—ahem—church-yard propriety," said he.

The poet bowed with a pleased expression, as one who is complimented on his expert knowledge of a recondite specialty.

"Would it be entirely proper and becoming in us three persons, drawn hither as we are to-night by our profound admiration of the Elegy and its author—to—to drink together—to the memory of Gray?"

"Undoubtedly," was the energetic response.
"What have you got to drink?"

"You shall see if you have a corkscrew."

"I never go without one, and here it is."

Meldrum produced the bottle and opened it in a trice, and then politely handed it to the poet to set an example of decorum in the performance of the solemn impending rite.

Mr. Hippledown raised the bottle slowly with his right hand to the extreme length of his arm, and removed his huge hat with his left hand. Pointing the neck of the bottle toward the zenith, as if in allusion to the present presumptive home of the poet, he brought it as slowly back to his lips, murmuring "Here's to the sacred memory of Gray," and kept it there for a surprising length of time, at an acute angle.

Wadlow was on the point of saying "turn," playfully, when Mr. Hippledown was obliged to pause for breath, recovering which, he remarked, as he passed the bottle, that he hoped he had opened the impressive ceremony with due solemnity.

"Admirably," said Meldrum, and he gravely

copied the stately method of his exemplar, as far as applying the flask to his lips. When the liquor began to trickle down his throat, its fiery quality nearly strangled him. He withdrew the bottle precipitately and handed it to Wadlow, who went through the prescribed formula with the same unpleasant result. The poet looked at them both with obvious compassion for their incapacity to gulp down raw spirits without flinching.

"I have another nice question of etiquette for you. Would it be wholly out of place to -- to smoke to the memory of Thomas Gray?"

"Not in the least. Regard the fumes of tobacco in the light of incense, and there you have a ceremony of the deepest significance. Pipe or cigar?"

Meldrum replied by a courteous tender of prime Havanas, and the three occupiers of Gray's tomb were soon exhaling clouds which bore skyward their heartfelt gratitude to the author of the Elegy.

Mr. Hippledown was clearly in the vein of hero-worship that night; for a few minutes afterward he grasped the bottle, which had been carelessly set down on the marble slab near him, and, without a word, applied it to the large orifice in his face, and took another long pull at the contents. This time his invocation, if any, was silently made, and a chance spectator would have supposed he was only

taking a stiff drink to quench a thirst which seemed well nigh insatiable.

When, at length, the physical necessity of breathing compelled him to withdraw the bottle, and it came again into Meldrum's hand, he noticed with some alarm its greatly reduced weight. He suspected that Mr. Hippledown had that temperamental weakness for liquor to which so many of the poetically gifted have fallen victims. He feared that this sad man, in trying to drown his sorrows, might get drunk, and that from his intoxication might arise some deed or word not entirely respectful to the shades of the man they all so greatly revered. Yielding to a not unreasonable impulse of precaution, he said, "I now beg to suggest still a third mode of expressing the same beautiful thought conveyed in the previous two ceremonies. It is a rite of the remotest antiquity."

Mr. Hippledown opened his eyes and mouth, wondering what was to come after brandy and cigars.

"I allude to the immemorial custom of libation," continued Meldrum, suddenly turning the bottle neck down and letting the pungent liquor gurgle to the ground at the base of the tomb.

"Oh! That's un-Christian—it's positively heathenish!" cried Mr. Hippledown, stretching out a hand in indignant protest. But Meldrum, with hat removed, and saying in a voice quivering as if with

emotion, "To the dear memory of Thomas Gray," permitted the mysterious concoction from the Green Man's cellar to drench the grass.

The act, for some reason, deeply offended Mr. Hippledown. He looked with disapproval at the spot whence the wasted spirits exhaled a penetrating odor. He sniffed several times as if regretfully parting with it. Then, after a little silence, which the Americans were indisposed to break (perhaps because their new-found friend was becoming slightly tedious) he rose, wrapped his long cloak about him, and with cold politeness, bade them good-night.

"Good-night!" said they together, and the unfeathered owl chimed in with his "ter-whit ter-who!"

The Americans extended their hands for a formal farewell, and each had a pretty little speech on the end of his tongue; but the poet turned his back on them and stalked along the pebbly path which led to the narrow road or lane adjoining the church-yard, the glow of his nervously puffed cigar making a little halo of light about his head. They called again "Good-night" and threw "Good luck" after it; but no response. In the kindness of his heart Meldrum regretted that he had done anything, even with the best intentions, to drive away the poor fellow. Had he known Mr. Hippledown better, he would have had no misgivings as to his capacity for

imbibing liquor without showing it in speech or deed. If the poet felt pride in anything outside his poetry it was in his exceptional gift of holding out against that intoxication to which weaker men were forced to yield in nocturnal bouts with the bottle at the village inn. Mr. Hippledown had instinctively surmised the true reason which prompted the libation, and deemed it an unjust reflection on himself. His sensibilities were as keenly wounded by it as if his poetical genius had been denied and derided. But it is not correct to infer that Mr. Hippledown was rendered unhappy in consequence. He was a man who dearly loved his grievance, and from choice was never without it, inventing one if there were none in reality. While the strangers were reproaching themselves for a fancied lack of sympathy with that humble disciple of Gray, he was felicitating himself on the acquisition of a good fresh grudge against Society. To him the bitterness of the thought was inexpressibly sweet.

Left to their own devices, they agreed that it was a measure of common prudence to get under cover. Cold and sleepy, they pictured to themselves the cosiness of Sir Thomas Crickenback's high-backed pew, with the chill taken off by a fire in the stove. As they walked toward the door of the church, Jo saw them from the tower, and sounding a last "ter-

who," descended to meet them. Meldrum expressed satisfaction with his able performance of the difficult part of owl, and gave him the stipulated sum with a gratifying bonus.

" Mayn't I do it for ye to-morrer night ? " asked the delighted boy.

" Once in a life time is enough," said his employer, laughingly. " But see here, Jo, can you imitate a cock crowing ? "

For answer he was saluted with a tremendous cock-a-doodle-doo, which provoked echoes from all the neighboring barn-yards.

" Admirable ! And a hunting horn ? "

A clear piercing toot was the response, which woke up some fox-hounds in a distant kennel, and they bayed in recognition of the call.

" Good ! Be under the altar window at sunrise and make both those sounds till you wake us and we cry out 'stop.' "

Meldrum desired to see how the church-yard would look at the breezy call of incense-breathing morn, to hear the incidental accompaniments of the cock's shrill clarion or the echoing horn, and possibly the swallow twittering from the straw-built shed, though he did not remember having seen any shed of that description in the vicinity. The fifth stanza of the Elegy, palpitating with exquisite imagery, had persistently haunted the friends for

many years, and they longed to realize it on the spot. Jo's rare talent of mimicry would enable them to do this.

"For another shillin' I'll throw in a bull, a sheep, a dog, and a cat. Or mebbe you'd like a bagpipe," and Jo gave a taste of its quality, which was bad save to the ears of a perfervid Scot.

"That will do now," said Meldrum, with his teeth on edge.

The bargain being struck for the simple matinee performance, as aforesaid, the party proceeded to the Crickenback pew, where Jo lighted the kindling wood in the convenient little stove and speedily reduced the chill to the point of endurance. Meldrum made himself at home in the great arm-chair whose soporific properties had been tested by so many generations of Sir Thomases. Wadlow stretched himself at full length on a bench with a hassock for a pillow. In ten minutes both were so fast asleep, after the fatigues of the night, that Boanerges thundering his "Lastly" from the pepper box of a pulpit hard by would have failed to wake them, though the sleepiest of Sir Thomases invariably opened his eyes from force of habit at that welcome stage of the perfunctory discourse.

The rude forefathers of the hamlet, in their narrow cells forever laid, were not a surer prey to dumb forgetfulness until sunrise the next day than the

tired inmates of Stoke Pogis church. But when Jo, as the cock crew thrice and followed with the blast of what seemed a fog horn for loudness, they had a decided advantage over the faster sleepers out there: for they were roused to consciousness and to all the pleasures of a new day.

A peremptory "Stop!" was necessary to end the odious noise raised by Jo in the conscientious performance of his contract.

As they emerged from the old church, the early morn was breathing an incense in which one might detect hawthorn, honey-suckle and roses, struggling for sweet supremacy. If there were no swallows twittering for the want of straw-built sheds, there were other swallows silently skimming the air for their breakfasts. The butterflies and bees had begun their foraging excursions among the wild flowers that nodded above the grass, more precious to the lover of nature than all the transplanted blossoms that money can buy. Neglected the spot may be by artificial gardening, but the impartial sun did not forget it in the allotment of his glorious beams, and the diamonds of dew tipping every tiny grass-blade were all of the first water. A deep and holy peace rested over all—a peace so grateful in contrast with the toil and din outside this charmed precinct, that one for the moment could hardly imagine a worse fate for the silent inhabitants of Stoke

Pogis church-yard than to be roused once more from their lowly beds to partake of the universal feverish unrest.

In a sense different from that conveyed by the poet, the Americans cast more than one long, lingering look behind, as they quitted the hallowed ground and trudged toward Slough and the railway station and the inevitable burdens of daily life.

CHAPTER XIV.

WITH BYRON ON THE JUNGFRAU.

“SUPPOSE we call this the identical spot, Madison,” said Meldrum, sinking exhausted on a table-rock that overhung a ravine.

“Agreed, Felix,” and Wadlow panted with the unwonted exertions which had raised him to a point just short of the snow line of the Jungfrau.

“There is nothing really to show that Manfred climbed any higher than this,” continued Meldrum, as if in apology to an invisible somebody who had accused him of shirking his duty.

“The place where we are seems to fill the principal requirements of Act I, Scene II,” added the other, in the same spirit of self-justification.

“Fully. Yonder are the blasted pines, on the slope by which we ascended, some hundreds of feet below us. Manfred must have had them in his eye when he was soliloquizing from the cliff.”

“And this is the cliff itself.”

The friends crawled cautiously to the brink and looked over. Their eyes having been adjusted for a depth of half a mile, they were sadly disillusioned

for the moment on seeing before them a depression of about sixty feet, down the bank of which they might have slid in perfect safety.

Meldrum was the first to rally, with a plausible explanation. "It has all been filled in by landslides since *Manfred*'s day. Time works wonderful changes in these mountains."

"Of course," seconded Wadlow. "No reasonable person would ask Nature to suspend her operations merely to oblige him. It would have given us great pleasure to find the fathomless gulf into which *Manfred* talked of jumping, precisely as he left it. But if avalanches will fall and fill up gorges with rocks and earth almost to the brim, we must only make the best of the altered situation."

"Speaking of avalanches, Madison, we ought to see some from here; *Manfred* did."

"That was before *Baedeker* was issued. If *Byron* had had a *Baedeker* in hand when he wrote *Manfred*, he would have learned from it that avalanches do not begin to fall till about noon, when the hot rays of the sun loosen the hold of the *Jungfrau* on the snow, and down it comes. Armed with that scientific truth, the poet would have set his *Manfred* on this—shall we call it dizzy?—height about luncheon-time, not before breakfast. Then it would have been all right for the misanthropic hero of the poem to invite the avalanches to crush him, which

they could not possibly have done before twelve, noon."

Meldrum here consulted his watch, with manifest anxiety, and remarked, "It's just ten. I must get back to the hotel to write some letters by noon. Let's take our luncheon now."

His hungry comrade gladly nodded assent and proceeded to divest himself of the little covered basket which was slung across his shoulder like a field-glass. A bottle of Yvorne, a half chicken, four hard boiled eggs, a loaf of black bread, and a thick slice of cheese, proved to be the contents, provided by the landlord of the Hotel des Alpes, which was their point of departure for the excursion. As they ate and sipped, they could not refrain from casting occasional glances at those glittering heights far above them, on which the awful avalanche was preparing for a plunge at twelve o'clock, sharp. Meanwhile, true to the spirit of the occasion, their ears and eyes were ready to note every incident that could serve further to identify the scene with that so graphically portrayed in the poem.

"Behold the winged and cloud-cleaving minister," cried Meldrum, pointing with a fork, tipped with a scrap of chicken, to a bird that was probably a crow instead of the eagle Manfred saw.

"And hark to the natural music of the mountain reed," exclaimed Wadlow, to whose sensitive tym-

panum was borne the strain of the distant Alpine horn blown by a bogus shepherd—the same to whom the two innocents had paid tribute on their way up.

“And the sweet bells of the sauntering herd,” added Meldrum, who had no difficulty whatever in hearing their melodious jingle, as the cows themselves were only a little distance down the mountain, grazing as contentedly and placidly as if in the safest depths of the Grindelwald.

“Sagacious animals, cows,” Wadlow hastened to remark. “I have heard that their wonderful instinct, in these high pastures of the Alps, always keeps them out of the track of avalanches.”

“Perhaps we had better join them then,” said Meldrum, who could not wholly quiet his apprehensions of a premature loosening of the great shining masses of snow up there, without reference to Baedeker’s time-tables.

“Not till we have rehearsed those passages that brought us here, Felix. You are Manfred. I am the chamois-hunter. Here is the brink of the precipice. Yonder is the ‘roused ocean of deep hell,’ which I must say is rather a strong expression for a little fog crawling up the mountain side. Proceed.” In his ardor, Wadlow hurled a neatly picked leg of a chicken at the head of his bosom friend, who coolly retaliated with a stony crust of bread,

which missed its mark and went over the cliff to the fate Manfred had coveted for himself.

Meldrum rose to his feet. Unaccustomed as he was to mountaineering, the climb of about a thousand feet from the hotel on the Wengern Alp had caused a stiffness of the legs. From this he obtained transient relief by executing a rudimentary pirouette—to take the kinks out of them—as he explained. Then grasping his smooth, new alpenstock, he thrust its sharp, burnished point into a crevice of the rock and, holding on tightly, looked into the ravine with an intrepidity well becoming his part.

“I wish it yawned a little more,” he said, in allusion to the comparative shallowness of Manfred’s fitting tomb, “though, to be sure, I am safer as it is.”

“I’ll do the yawning, while you are reciting the lines, Felix.”

Meldrum did not smile at this ill-timed jest, because he had already assumed the gloomy demeanor appropriate to the character of the confirmed man-hater. It was no easy thing to quench the mirth in his eye and curve his lips into the bow of despair, but his spirit was in the part and he did it. As he stood there with one hand on the alpenstock for support, and the other holding a 16mo edition of *Manfred*, his round, ruddy face needed to be lengthened only an

inch or two and bleached with midnight vigils, to represent the woe-begone visage of Byron's hero. Meldrum was familiar with that theory of the istrionic art, which requires the actor never to forget that he is Jones when he is in the very crisis and passion of Hamlet. He had great respect for it, because it had been ratified in print by so many masters of the theater. It was because he was a mere boy—not rising even to the dignity of a drawing-room amateur—that he at once lost himself hopelessly in his part. Luckily for him, there was no spectacled critic sitting on a reserved rock immediately before him to cut him up in the next morning's paper because he had merged Meldrum into Ianfred. Beginning with the melancholy line, "The spirits I have raised abandon me," it would have been apparent to the only human observer, Vadlow (had not the speaker's voice reached that gentleman through his back), that the genial Meldrum was thoroughly loathing himself and impartially extending that aversion to all mankind. The profound guttural tones in which he opened the soliloquy conveyed the same idea in a measure; but, as this soon made Meldrum hoarse, he was obliged to abandon it and go on in his natural accents at a higher pitch. But what the voice lacked in expressiveness, the face revealed. Even Vadlow, had he been in front instead of reserving

himself in the rear, as the coming chamois-hunter, would have been startled by the God-forsaken, fiend-tormented look of the most contented and amiable of chums.

As Meldrum pursued his passionate declamation, sinking himself most inartistically deeper and deeper into the diabolical individuality of Manfred, the scene before him gradually accommodated itself to the demands of the lines. He could see the torrent where there was not even a trout brook, and tall pines dwindled as to shrubs by dizziness of distance in a smooth pasturage not three hundred feet below him. Another crow opportunely stood—or rather flew—for the eagle at the right instant. The nearby cows shook their bells when he reached the musical lines relating to them. The Alpine horn, industriously worked at a stone's throw beneath him, continued to be heard as a running accompaniment through the whole of the speech. It was the shepherd's pipe in excess, and was the only overdone thing in the whole performance. The concluding words, "which made me," were the cue for Wadlow, as the chamois-hunter, suddenly entering upon the scene. Taking his innings, that gentleman recited his few introductory lines with much propriety, and was sorry when they ended just as he was warming up to the work.

Manfred was not supposed to see him or hear

what he said, but Meldrum obligingly paused till his friend had finished. Then he resumed his patronizing observations to nature, his execration of the human family, and his impartial damning of himself withal, till the chamois-hunter again took his turn. The lines given to this character by Byron are insignificant until the dramatic climax is reached, where Manfred winds up by gathering himself for the fatal jump. Vadlow was saving up for his only chance—the rare opportunity offered by the intending suicide, when the chamois-hunter grasps Manfred in the very act of springing from the cliff and exclaims—“Hold, madman! though weary of this life, stain not our pure vales with thy guilty blood!” etc., etc., etc.

The long-expected cue came at last. “Earth take these atoms,” cried Meldrum, with a strikingly realistic movement, as if to dive headlong into the abyss. If he had been in good earnest—and it looked very like it, so absorbed was he in the personation—he would have been balked, so strong was the grip suddenly laid upon his coat-collar—but not by his dearest of friends. Vadlow cried “Hold madman!” all right with immense effect. But another man, who had suddenly appeared upon the scene, supplied the action, and that second man, knowing nothing whatever of the part he was arrogantly meddling with,

said tranquilly, "You musn't kill yourself, you know." At the same time he glanced over the edge of the cliff, and added, with a laugh, "not much of a jump, anyhow."

The sudden jerk on his collar shook Meldrum back to his real self. Far from being aggrieved by this rude interference of a perfect stranger, he at once realized that the liberty which had been taken with his person was a spontaneous and sincere tribute to his enactment of a difficult part which he may be said to have created, since it has never been put upon the stage. Sinking Manfred, he laughed as Meldrum, and was about to make some playful remark about one chamois-hunter too many, when Wadlow spoke up. Nobody had shaken him out of any illusion. He was still the chamois-hunter with his best speech to come, out of which he had been cut by this startling apparition. He wanted the performance to proceed.

"If you know the lines, go ahead," said Wadlow to the stranger, with forced calmness. "If not, give me a show."

"The lines—what do you mean?"

"My dear sir," explained Meldrum, interposing, "we have been acting a little piece by Byron, with natural scenery. That's all. My friend only wants to know whether you or he will go on with the part of the chamois-hunter. It's all the same to

me, now that my life is saved. But we can't have two chamois-hunters at once, you know. Settle it between yourselves."

"I always liked Byron's pieces," said the stranger. "What's the name of this one?"

"*Manfred*."

"I never heard of it. It does not seem to be very funny, like his other pieces."

"Like his other pieces!" echoed Meldrum and Wadlow in a chorus of amazement, as they recalled the unrelieved gloom of *Cain*, *Werner*, and *Manfred*.

"His farces and extravaganzas, you know. I thought I should have died laughing at his '*Golden Gridiron*' at Drury Lane, last Boxing night."

By this time it had dawned upon the friends that the stranger's Byron and their own were two distinct persons; the latter poet of that distinguished name being the popular playwright who happened to be the only Byron known as a dramatist to chamois-hunter No. 2.

There is no leveler of English class distinctions more complete than a Knickerbocker suit. As the stranger stood before them for his full length portrait, clad from head to foot in the costume which all mountaineering Englishmen affect, it was impossible to tell whether he was a bank clerk, a commercial traveler, an Oxford professor, or a peer of the realm. Having no gun strapped to his back or

cartridges buckled about his waist, he was evidently not in pursuit of chamois, and that discovery deprived him of his only interest in the eyes of the Americans. It was as if he had thrust himself into their company under false pretenses.

But, when he told them, the next minute, that he was on the way "up there" (meaning a crag half covered with snow, two thousand feet or more above them) in the hope of picking some edelweiss with his own hands to send to friends in London, they felt that here was a man with a latent capacity for chamois-hunting only waiting to be developed by circumstances. For they had been repeatedly assured, down in the valley, by men having bunches of edelweiss to sell at a franc each, that the flower can be gathered *in situ* only by the most reckless exposure of life and limb. In books of travels—as they well remembered—the narrators invariably pluck their edelweiss on the sheer slope of precipices, being lowered with ropes tied round their waists by trusted companions above. Like Shakespeare's samphire gathering, the search for the velvety plant would seem to be indeed a dreadful trade, and if it is true that it has been for these many years privately cultivated to perfection in the back yards of every Swiss chalet, humanity is a gainer by that domestication of the most prized of the Alpine flora.

"Ta, ta!" said the Englishman, cheerily, "I'm off," and the unknown made his exit as sudden as his entrance. It was characteristic of his race that he had expressed no surprise at the selection of that particular place for the rehearsal of a play. Had he come upon Meldrum and Wadlow in the act of standing on their heads, he would have been equally passive and uninquisitive.

"If there were no Alps to climb, what would these plucky Englishmen do?"

"They would take to treadmills."

The idea of John Bull puffing up an endless staircase solely for the pleasure of surmounting obstacles, struck the inventor of it as very droll, and he laughed noisily. It was a healthy, happy laugh; but manifestly out of place on an occasion solemnly set apart for reviving the peculiar set of emotions which should be inspired by a recital of *Manfred* in the shadow of the Jungfrau.

Respectable, law-abiding persons themselves, Meldrum and Wadlow had, as far back as their college days, conceived a strong liking for the character of *Manfred*. They had preserved this partiality during their after life in New York, while still maintaining unblemished reputations amid the crucial tests of a great city. They would never confess it, save to one another; but, at times, they envied *Manfred* his haunting memory of some fright-

ful, inexpiable crime. Sleeping their regular seven hours, they would in their innocence have gladly exchanged that unbroken slumber for an occasional night of harrowing retrospection and remorse,—just to see how it felt. Holding evil spirits in proper abhorrence, they would, at times, have dearly loved to raise the devil and order him about, even at the fearful price which must always be paid for that privilege. Thinking, as they did, pretty well of human nature on the whole, there were moments when they both heartily wished to taste the forbidden pleasures of thorough misanthropy. They were prepared to understand how much downright enjoyment might be derived from implacably hating not merely individuals, but the race of man entire. It had always seemed to them that the half-breed of cynics and pessimists they had known in clubland had missed the full measure of their gratification by not including everything and everybody in their sweeping distrust and contempt, instead of now and then speaking tolerantly of persons and events here and there. Now to Manfred's misanthropy there were no weak exceptions.

Estimating themselves quite cheaply, frankly admitting that they were in truth nobodies in the immediate vicinity of snow mountains and glaciers and avalanches, they all the more admired Manfred's lofty disdainful patronage of those sublime

and terrific phenomena. It is all very well to preach about Man's supremacy over Nature, and the incalculable greatness of the human soul, even when contrasted with the most stupendous machinery of the universe; but it requires the boundless egotism and audacity of a Manfred to assert one's self on a spur of the Jungfrau.

For all these reasons it was Manfred, even more than the peerless mountain itself, which had drawn them to Interlaken, and up the Wengern Alp, and to the particular spot where they were now reclining. There they were unconsciously bearing new testimony to the power of that enchantment which had yielded them a greater pleasure than any other afforded by their Swiss tour. Byron, the enchanter, was giving them their finest pleasure among the Alps.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. GREATFIELD AGAIN FREES HER MIND.

THE sun had been steadily mounting the sky and his heat increasing, while they were regaling themselves upon Byronic impressions of the Jungfrau.

"I think," said Meldrum, "that the avalanches, now about due, can be seen much better from the hotel." Wadlow was of the same opinion.

They therefore began their descent, which was not difficult, as they had only to follow the easy-sloping, zigzag cowpaths which generations of intelligent herds had trodden.

"One of the advantages of not going very far up a mountain," remarked Meldrum, philosophically, "is the corresponding shortness of the distance down."

They were in a state of complete self-satisfaction when they reached the hotel. If they had experienced some fatigue from the morning's little adventure, they were content to have paid that price for it. Secure beyond question from the destructive sweep of the most formidable avalanche, they were now prepared to behold that phenomenon with

entire composure, and were as anxious for it to begin as they had been to have it postponed an hour before. Their suspense was not for long. The vertical rays of the sun performed their appointed work with unfailing punctuality and certainty. If the Jungfrau had been under written contract with the hotel men on the Wengern Alp and the Murren, the two observatories provided by nature for the safe witnessing of the spectacle,—the agreement to furnish avalanches with neatness and dispatch could not have been more faithfully kept.

The snow and ice had begun to move in their old well-worn grooves from points far up the mountain side, and Meldrum and Wadlow were watching the shining cascades with breathless interest, when their attention was suddenly called off from the magnificent exhibition by the appearance of two human beings directly in front of them. As the morning had been exceptionally fine, great numbers of people had improved the occasion to ascend the Wengern Alp on foot or on horseback, or borne in chairs slung between poles; and none of these, though making quite a crowd and incessantly chattering in English, French, and German, had disturbed the two friends in their sweet fit of abstraction. They could shut their eyes to every sight but the flash of the avalanches, and their ears to every sound but the low rumble of their fall. But

here now was a sight and here was a sound that broke in, and not unpleasantly, on their close communion with Nature.

The sound was that of well-remembered female voices. The speakers were the ladies they had met at Kenilworth and Coventry. They had just alighted from chairs, and were standing within ten feet of them and giving orders to the sturdy porters, two of whom (the bearers of the stouter lady) were blowsy and red from their great exertions.

Meldrum and Wadlow rose to their feet and, if they were for one moment undecided about advancing and offering their assistance to their country-women, they were put entirely at ease by Mrs. Greatfield. As her bright eyes fell upon them, she smiled so cordially that they stepped forward and offered their hands without any fear of a rebuff. Miss Robison, with hardly less readiness, met them half-way. Surely, if punctilio may be waived and formal introductions dispensed with anywhere, it is amid the hurly burly of a Swiss inn, where people of the same nationality (unless they are New Yorkers or Bostonians) seen impelled to form groups in self-defense against the rest. If two of these people happen to be male and two female—and all unmarried—that tendency is very marked, indeed.

No courier or maid being visible, Meldrum officially charged himself with carrying the

widow's little load of shawls and wraps, hand-bag and umbrella; and Wadlow took the same liberty with the personal effects of the other lady.

"The idea of sensible Americans coming all the way over here to see Jungfrau, when they have bigger mountains at home," said the widow, laughing. "I want it distinctly understood that I am here to oblige *her*. Shasta and Tacoma are good enough for me."

"But they have no history—no poetical associations, Carrie. That makes the difference," said Miss Robison, evidently employing arguments which she had used before with her vivacious friend.

"Nonsense! They have all the history there is. Aren't they as old as the Jungfrau? And as for poetry, there have been plenty of pieces in the California papers about them. I was born out there and ought to know."

"Have you ever seen Shasta?" asked the widow, addressing the two gentlemen.

They shook their heads regretfully.

"Nor Tacoma?"

They were obliged to say "No;" but earnestly expressed their desire of seeing both mountains some time.

"Ah! You'll like them, because they are so easy to do. They are just made for Americans. You don't have to be carried up any Wengern Alps in

an old chair by two men to see the whole of Shasta. You sit in your Pullman car and have it in view all day."

"And Tacoma?" queried Meldrum, who appreciated mountains made easy.

"They have a first-class hotel expressly built for Tacoma, with two hundred rocking-chairs on the piazza. You secure one of these for the day and there you sit and watch the mountain. It's about three miles up in the air--all from the sea level, too. You don't have to knock off half a mile to begin with, as you do here. Ha, ha!"

Meldrum and Wadlow signified their gratification at these statements by nods and smiles, Mrs. Greatfield's eloquence in defense of her native mountains not affording a gap for any words but her own. At this stage of the conversation—or monologue—the party had reached the bureau of the little inn, and the ladies were shown to the room which had been engaged for them by telegraph from Interlaken.

The gentlemen resumed their seats in the open air and their attention to the Jungfrau. The avalanches were now in full play of noon-tide, and were declared by an observer no less veteran than the portly landlord, to be grand beyond precedent. But they found in Meldrum and Wadlow only listless spectators of their grandeur.

Desirous as they were to surrender themselves wholly to the contemplation of the Queen of Mountains and the pageantry of her court, their truant minds would wander off to the ladies into whose company a bountiful Providence had thrown them for the third time. A good idea occurred to Meldrum, and he acted on it with the quickness that it deserved. Calling a waiter, he ordered a light luncheon for himself and friend, and giving the man an impressive tip, told him to reserve the adjoining table for two ladies, who would soon appear, and to show them to it as the only one at their disposal. He was confident that Mrs. Greatfield, being free from that "nonsense" from which widows, as a class, are supposed to be exempt, would make no disguise of the sharp appetite which the mountain air must have engendered, and would demand a substantial meal at the earliest moment. His expectations were well founded. In about ten minutes the ladies reappeared, and Mrs. Greatfield, with hunger stamped on every feature, cast her eyes up and down the rows of cleanly-napkined tables, made further enticing by bright services of glass, porcelain and cutlery. The bribed waiter advanced to their aid and led them quite peremptorily to the table reserved for them by the designing Meldrum. If the widow and her friend suspected the intention of this seemingly accidental arrangement, they be-

trayed their suspicion by no sign. They apparently accepted it as fortuitous and the gentlemen were put entirely at their ease by being accosted first.

"Did you ever read Byron?" asked the widow, archly.

Meldrum and Wadlow hastened to assure her that they had read the works of the noble bard in their younger days.

"*She* bought it at Interlaken, and here it is"—producing from a little bag a miniature volume, which Wadlow received from her hand. Glancing over it hastily the friends perceived that it was an unabridged edition.

"I bought it on account of *Manfred*," explained Miss Robison, with a show of color. "The guide books quote from it in connection with their description of the Staubbach Fall and the Jungfrau. Reading the poem has heightened my enjoyment of the splendid scenery of the Alps."

The gentlemen were greatly pleased to find in this young lady a taste for the sublime in nature and poetry akin to their own, and what was more, a frankness to confess that she had read *Manfred*, without conventionally adding that Byron must have been a monster to have written it. They volubly assured her that their own liking for *Manfred* was so great that they had paid a morning visit to the Jungfrau expressly to verify the magnificent

imagery of the poem and to enter as far as possible into the feelings of Manfred himself.

While these explanations were progressing, Mrs. Greatfield had carefully ordered a generous luncheon, and now turned to take her part in the conversation.

"I've read *Manfred*, too," said the widow, smiling, "to oblige *her*. Shall I tell you what I think about it?"

The gentlemen declared that nothing would give them greater pleasure.

"It was written to spite *Byron's* wife. Anybody can see that after reading the life of *Byron* in this book. Though they had separated, he knew she would read every line of poetry he printed to see if he said anything about her. How he must have eased her with that *Astarte*! It's too absurd. Ha, ha!"

"Teased her?" asked Wadlow, not quite catching the idea.

"Yes. Don't you know in the poem, whenever the lady *Astarte* is introduced there is always a break just when the story becomes interesting. You think you are going to find out what had happened to her, and you run against one of those dashes which are so dreadfully provoking in novels. If we are all curious to know what *Manfred* had done to *Astarte*, how much more curious Lady

Byron must have been? I can imagine her going crazy over the puzzle."

"Who, in your opinion, was Astarte?" asked Meldrum, whose mind had been reopening the controversy which raged over that question some years ago.

The widow distended her blue eyes as if amazed at the simplicity of the question.

"Why Astarte was—nobody. A man who could invent demons and witches could make Astartes in any quantity. There is a large assortment of them in these pages. I have been looking through the whole book, you see."

"And were all Byron's heroines invented to annoy his wife? After they had separated, I mean."

"Every one of them," said the widow, triumphantly. Then, with a touch of compassion in her voice, "It's a real pity that a man with such a heart should have been thrown away by Lady Byron. A husband like that is a scarce article in this cold world."

Miss Robison bowed her head gently in approval of the proposition. It was evident that the poet had these two ladies on his side. Wadlow took up the examination of the witness, whom the shade of Byron had summoned as an expert in his defense that day.

"Do you think that Byron still loved his wife, when he wrote *Manfred*?"

"His heart was just breaking for her. If it had not been, do you suppose he would have tried to make her jealous and unhappy by bragging about his affairs with the Astartes and all the rest of them?"

Miss Robison's mild brown eyes seconded this question.

"Then you are of the opinion that the blame of their continued separation rested with Lady Byron alone?"

"I am sure of it. She had only to whistle to him and he would have come back to her. If she had cared a bit for the man, she could have brought him to her feet. Oh! so easily, after *Manfred* was printed."

"How?" asked Wadlow, with much earnestness, for he had always assumed that that poem had effectually closed the door of reconciliation against Byron.

"She should have worked a nice muffler, and a pair of good warm mittens with her own hands, and sent them to him with a little note asking him to wear them for her sake the next time he went up in the Jungfrau. Nothing goes further with a husband, as every married man knows, than a present of her own worsted work from his wife. She is so generally doing it for somebody else, you see."

Wadlow and Meldrum accepted this dictum as a valuable addition to their stock of useful knowledge.

"There was another way," continued the willing witness. "Lady Byron could have made everything pleasant between them by expressing some sympathy for his liver complaint."

"I did not know that anything was the matter with Byron's liver," said Wadlow, wondering where the widow had discovered a fact unknown to the poet's numerous biographers.

"Nor I either," was the laughing rejoinder. "But I am sure Byron would have been delighted if she had thought so. If a man is nervous, irritable, quarrelsome; if he says he has lost all his friends and wishes he was dead—and that is the kind of man Byron seems to have been at times—you just tell him that his liver is out of order and see how his face will light up with pleasure."

Wadlow promised her he would make the experiment at the first opportunity.

"I know what I am talking about," said the widow, with increasing animation. "I had a friend in Minneapolis, whose husband was a good-hearted man with a dreadful temper. When anything went wrong with his business he was a perfect bear round the house. He would nag and scold her at the least thing. When he was very much excited, if

she opposed him in anything, ever so little, he would smash the furniture; and once he pulled off the tablecloth with all the breakfast things."

"An uncomfortable husband," remarked Meldrum.

"And yet that same man could be quieted down by his wife in a minute, and made to apologize, and the row always ended by his presenting her with a new dress or a set of diamonds or furs, and once she got a beautiful landau and a pair of bobtailed horses out of him, with a real English coachman thrown in."

"Wonderful!" cried Wadlow. "It beats the lady lion tamer out of sight."

"Nothing was easier," said the widow, who could not have told the story with greater pride in the achievement had she been herself the subduer of the ferocious husband. "When he was tearing round and breaking things she would keep perfectly cool, and say as sweetly as I do now: 'I am so sorry about your liver, dear. You must take a pill to-night.' He would quiet down in a jiffy. You see it flattered him to think that she did not blame him, but his liver; that he was all right and his liver was all wrong. It was like throwing the responsibility of his acts on somebody else. Every Christmas she used to present him with a new liver pad."

"Did it cure him?" asked Meldrum.

"Oh, no," was the response. "Pads, plasters, pills—she tried everything that was advertised, on him—never cured him of his liver complaint, because, between you and me (this in a sunken voice, as if in strict confidence) there was nothing really the matter with his liver. It was the man's horrible temper all the time, but she did not mind that when she found out how to manage him. He was so good after these fits that she used to like to see them coming on. Ha, ha!"

"And you really think that Lady Byron could have managed her husband in the same way?"

"I have no doubt of it."

It was not for the male listeners to controvert the opinion of a lady apparently so well qualified to judge of the complicated relations of the sexes *in vinculo matrimonii*. They were reduced to silence in the presence of so much practical wisdom, and, for a little space, all four confined themselves to the demolition of the neglected luncheons.

Then Wadlow bethought himself of the irrepressible contention between the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, of which the two ladies were respectively the able champions, and he roguishly ventured the observation, "I suppose now there is no such bear of a husband in St. Paul."

The widow and Miss Robison recognized the playful allusion to their chronic cause of disputation and

laughed heartily. The younger only said, "I am sure I don't know," as indeed, how should she, with her inexperience of those marital tempests which rarely blow when a third person is around. Mrs. Greatfield thus spoke: "If you expect me, just because I live in Minneapolis, to declare that St. Paul is full of quarrelsome husbands, you are much mistaken, I can tell you. *We have buried the hatchet.*"

Meldrum and Wadlow both murmured their pleasure at the return of peace, and hoped it would be lasting.

"This is how it happened," continued the widow. "The peace dates from the receipt of a letter by me from Minneapolis yesterday. It seems that there was a large debt owing the estate, and covered by a mortgage on unimproved land within the city limits of St. Paul. This land has been sold under foreclosure, and bought in by the estate. Don't you see, that makes me interested in St. Paul as well as Minneapolis, and I am blowing for both cities now. Ha, ha!"

Meldrum and Wadlow could do no less than congratulate St. Paul on the acquisition of so powerful an ally. They also appreciated the delicacy with which the widow alluded to "the estate," meaning herself, and the charming *naïveté* of her assumption that they necessarily knew who she was, so fully

were her movements paragraphed in the society journals of European capitals and watering-places.

A faithful report of whatever conversation ensued is not within the scope of this brief chronicle. But it is certain that when the little improvised party broke up late in the afternoon, and the ladies continued their journey by chair toward Grindelwald and the gentlemen remounted their mules and headed for Interlaken, there was a unanimous wish in the breasts of the four persons that they might all meet again somewhere. And yet, such is the reserve of the human heart in the treatment of its warmest promptings, that the couples went their different ways without a single word about a possible reunion.

Will they meet again? As the elder novelists used to say, "Time will show."

CHAPTER XVI.

WITH HAWTHORNE IN STATE STREET, BOSTON.

ON their voyage homeward, Meldrum and Wadlow made the acquaintance of a fresh-lipped, blue-eyed, agreeable young Bostonian, named Finch. He was much interested in the accounts of their visits to places over which the spell of enchantment had been thrown by the great poets and novelists. He expressed a strong desire to test, in their company, his own capacity for reproducing to the eye scenes and occurrences selected from the writings of famous American authors. Meldrum and Wadlow seriously questioned the fitness of this amiable person for sharing the pleasure which they had fortunately brought within their own reach.

To yield to an enchanter implies, first of all things, not only the passive readiness, but also the anxiety to be enchanted. The caviling, or fault-finding mood, is fatally hostile to that mental attitude which is indispensable to success in the line of experiments they had made. Now, Finch, having passed directly from college to an important position in a long-established private classical school of Boston, had become by virtue of his university

course and his professional career a confirmed, fastidious, well-meaning, but highly intolerant critic. The hypercritical spirit which he had acquired at college might have been knocked out of him by a few years of roughing with his equals or superiors, who had themselves outlived its depressing influences. But his immediate transition from the prejudices and narrowness of the academic life to the chair of Vice-Principal in a young gentleman's seminary, left him no time or opportunity to be cured of the besetting weakness which he honestly supposed to be his strength.

To the older, wiser, liberal-minded and tolerant Meldrum and Wadlow, it was a cause of regret that a fellow, as pleasant in many ways as Finch, should be possessed of this devil of depreciation—this morbid propensity for fastening on the deficiencies, the shortcomings, the limitations of every work of genius that could be named, without any recognition whatever of its merits, however supreme and undeniable. Thus, if Thackeray were under discussion, Finch would say, "He is too cynical." If one praised Dickens's humor, Finch would add, "But he could not draw a gentleman." He considered Scott "diffuse and prolix," Bulwer and Disraeli "stilted and affected," Macaulay "rhetorical," Carlyle "malicious," Motley "sweetly monotonous," Ruskin "fanciful," and that was all he had to say about

them. In his opinion Shelley was a "rhapsodist," Browning "obscure," Tennyson "addicted to 'mannerism,'" Gray "conventional," Byron a "monster of egotism," Swinburne and Whitman "beastly," Emerson "deficient in logic and connectedness," Longfellow "slipshod and superficial." It was not possible to mention to Finch a single eminent writer of prose or poetry that ever lived, without provoking from him an instant softly-spoken reference to the presence of some defect in the mind or heart of that author, usually with an apt citation to prove it. For Finch was a rapid and omnivorous reader, and his eye was quick to catch, and his memory was tenacious to retain, errors of statement, lame reasonings, wrong conclusions, and verbal inaccuracies and inelegancies of every description. Doubtless, he could have recalled, with the same ease and precision, the "beauties" of these same authors, but he never did so. Yet he thought it within his power to share with Meldrum and Wadlow their keen enjoyment of something which depended absolutely on the absence of the overbalancing critical faculty in the participant. They told him that he was asking for impossibilities; since it was evident that he would not surrender himself unreservedly to any human enchanter.

Finch laughed, and admitted that he feared it was so, though his manner was that of pride in the

possession of a mind steeled against the wiles to which weaker persons succumbed.

“Name the man, the place, and the time,” said Meldrum to him one morning, as they were pacing the deck before breakfast. He was referring to the oft-discussed suggestion of an experiment in which Finch might take part as a novice and test, once for all, his qualifications for the performance of the special feat in which his two new friends excelled.

Finch’s response was instantaneous. “I name Hawthorne as the author. The place shall be the open paved space before the old State House, Boston. The time shall be within a month of our landing—say, November the first.”

“I understand,” replied Meldrum, who knew his Hawthorne thoroughly. “You would conjure up the most impressive and thrilling scene in the ‘Scarlet Letter,’ where Rev. Mr. Dimmesdale takes Hester Prynne by one hand and little Pearl by the other and leads them up the steps of the pillory in front of the old First Church, and there confesses his sin to the whole people.”

“You have said it. If I can see anything, I ought to be able to see that; for nothing more dramatic and impressive was ever penned by mortal hand. It acts itself for you on the printed page.”

“Quite true. In my humble opinion, the “Scarlet Letter” is the most original and powerful work

of fiction yet produced in America, and the twenty-third chapter is its masterly culmination. But have you no fault to pick with Hawthorne?" continued Meldrum, quizzically, remembering that that illustrious name had not been dragged into any of their numerous discussions of books and authors.

"Oh, none whatever! He is one of my greatest favorites. Except, perhaps," he could not refrain from adding, "that he lacks humor."

Meldrum laughed. "Do you think that the 'Scarlet Letter' would have been improved by a comic character? Would you have planted a funny man down there in the crowd before the pillory to crack his jokes while that terrible scene of remorse and self-expiation was in progress?" Meldrum was fond of putting his suppositions strongly.

Wadlow here jumped into the debate to reinforce his chum, before Finch could formulate a reply. "It is true that the 'Scarlet Letter' is devoid of what we call humor, not because, in my opinion, Hawthorne was deficient in humor, but because he thought it incongruous with the prevailing deeply somber tone of the story. But the introduction, entitled 'the Custom House,' which naturally leads up to the tale, if it is not essential to it, has a pure vein of fun worthy of Irving or Dickens."

Meldrum here struck in with the remark that if the "Scarlet Letter" contained no rollicking

humorous character, there was something better in it. That was the elfish, tricksy, willful, charming little Pearl, who danced through its darkness like a sunbeam. As an artistic foil, she was a Shakespearian creation. "The joviality which provokes a downright laugh, - if that is what you mean,"—said Meldrum in conclusion, "I should consider as much out of place in the body of the 'Scarlet Letter' as a clown at a funeral."

It was a redeeming trait in Finch's character that he never lost his temper, no matter how hard pressed. Meldrum had asserted himself somewhat positively, even aggressively, in thus laying down the law for the admission or exclusion of humor in a given case. But Finch laughed rippling as he said, "Possibly I am all wrong. But I still think that a broadly humorous touch here and there would have made the tragic element in the 'Scarlet Letter' even more prominent and effective, and therefore would have been the truest art." He uttered this as genially and sweetly as if he had been passing the highest encomium on the author. There was no such thing as quarreling with a critic so bland in the deliverance of his asperities. Meldrum only retorted :

"All right; but I predict you will pay the penalty of your disbelief in the artistic perfection of Hawthorne by being denied the spectacle that

you crave. However, we will make the trial for you."

Exeunt omnes, at the sound of the breakfast gong.

On the first of November, Meldrum and Wadlow arrived in Boston by the morning train from New York and went directly to Young's, where a meeting with Finch had been arranged to take place at noon precisely. Each brought with him a copy of the "Scarlet Letter" and a map of Boston, armed with which they visited the site of the impending experiment, in order to study and understand the exact locations and relations of the original market-place, the earliest church, and the pillory which stood nearly beneath its eaves. By correspondence with Finch they had already become possessed of all that history and tradition have handed down about a locality the most famous, by association, in Boston town. They knew from the best available testimony that the open space now occupied by, and eastward of, the old State House was the ancient market-place, the boundaries of which have remained, but little changed, to this day. They had sufficient reasons for believing that the present site of Brazer's Building, bounded by State and Devonshire streets and Congress Place, was that of the square, one-storied, thatched church, whereof the godly Master Dimmesdale was the eloquent and

adored pastor. And they readily identified the spot where the pillory must have stood at the western extremity of the market-place, as required by Hawthorne. Having settled upon these scenic details and resolved upon a certain plan of operations, more for the benefit of the skeptical, unimaginative, and impervious Finch than for their own behoof, they returned to Young's and braced themselves for the forthcoming trial by a final reading of the closing scene of the story (which alone they designed to put to proof), pending the appearance of their Boston friend.

The clock was striking twelve as Finch reported at the rendezvous, thereby greatly pleasing the two New Yorkers, who reckoned punctuality one of the principal virtues. He was alert, blithe, radiant with good nature and high spirits, as became a healthy, prosperous young man on a cool, sunny November day. There was a hearty interchange of greetings, and then Meldrum fell to business with his customary alacrity and directness.

“Anybody can see that you are physically in good form for our little experiment. And that is an essential thing, I can tell you. But have you refreshed your recollection of the twenty-third chapter this morning? Is every incident of it perfectly clear to you in the order it is set down?”

Finch avoided a categorical answer, and only replied, with smiling confidence, "I have it all by heart, trust me," at the same time touching his white and rounded forehead.

"There is where you terrible critics carry your hearts," observed Wadlow, with a laugh.

Finch laughed, too, and blushed as one who had been complimented on a rare excellence. "Thank you," said he, modestly. "If you imply that my personal sympathies and preferences—such as the heart might prompt—are held in strict suspense when I pass judgment on a work of literature or art, I must honestly plead guilty to the indictment."

Wadlow knew that there was some unexpressed specific thing behind this general proposition, so airily avowed. He determined to draw out his man.

"Now, I dare say," he said, banteringly, "you could improve on Hawthorne's treatment of the scene at the pillory."

"To be frank, I think it might be touched up to advantage. For instance, there is no good and sufficient reason why the Rev. Mr. Dimmesdale should have been allowed by the author to ascend the platform and publicly avow his sin in the exaggerated terms he employs, and make that shocking exhibition of a scarlet letter which he had burned into his own breast in a moment of harrowing re-

morse. The reader of the book well knows how fully the poor fellow had already been punished in his own conscience for his one and only offense, and the sufferer might have been spared this last and needless humiliation. It did not relieve the adulterous wife, the partner of his crime, from any of the odium which still attached to her. It was of no service to the pretty little Pearl, the offspring of their joint guilt. And the self-inflicted agony of the minister's confession caused his death on the spot, as well it might have done. What good did it all do?"

"But my dear fellow," urged Wadlow, "all these incidents, the painfulness of which in the reading I fully admit, are indispensable to the story. Its keynote, or motive, is the irresistible goading power of the old Puritan conscience which could not rest till Dimmesdale had taken the full measure of his penalty on this earth for sins done in the body, instead of waiting for the balance to be struck in another world. How could this governing idea of the Scarlet Letter be carried to its logical conclusion short of his own public proclamation of his guilt on the very spot where the Puritan law would have condemned him to stand seven years before, by the side of Hester Prynne, and wearing another big red 'A?'" The speaker rested, as one who has propounded "a poser."

Finch responded, with his invincible blandness, "What you say of the keynote, or motive, of the tale is all true. Dimmesdale's intentions were, in the circumstances, natural, proper, and, if you please, laudable. But when the reader has once been informed that the erring pastor intended to make this really absurd and needless self-expiation of his offense, that should have sufficed, without permitting the man's design to be literally carried out."

"How could it have been prevented?" asked Meldrum, with some curiosity.

"Simply by letting the minister die of excessive emotion, at the foot of the platform, or while he is slowly ascending the steps with Hester's arm around him, or on the platform itself at the foot of the pillory, and to die before he could say a single word in his own condemnation. The reader would have given Mr. Dimmesdale the full credit of his morbidly conscientious purpose and the moral of the story would have been equally well enforced, and one of the most shocking *denouements* in fiction would have been artistically avoided."

"Ah!" said Meldrum, with a sigh that was half a laugh, "I now realize fully how far apart we are. You belong to the class that wants its novels always mild, unemotional, uneventful, with all the tragedies and sorrows of life hinted at or told by indirection

and obliquely. You call that the highest reach of Art, but heaven knows why! The model novelist of this school would probably have expended himself freely on a description of the planks and other component parts of the platform and pillory, and would have reported the running comments of the spectators below (which Hawthorne omits). But when it came to the death of Dimmesdale—if an author of your new school had let him die at all—the reader would not have been sure that anything more had happened to him than a fainting spell, from which he might recover in the next chapter, and his death would have remained, to the end of the book, a matter of pure inference. Much of what is termed art in current fiction is not art concealing art, but art concealing nature, and one of its aims is to shirk difficulties of description."

Finch's smile never deserted him. "I see that we differ, beyond hope of agreement, on the main issue, our points of view being so widely separated," he remarked. "But as to one matter, I think, we will agree. It was too bad, was it not, now, that the minister's ardent, devoted, life-long friends, those to whom he had been good and true and helpful all through, should have been obliged to listen to that startling acknowledgment of his guilt and shame from his own lips. It is well that some idols should be shattered. But it is a terrible thing

to lose one's faith in all piety and purity; and that must have been sadly shaken, if not destroyed, by Dimmesdale's astounding, overwrought revelation of his inner self."

"Now, now, I have you," cried Wadlow, gayly. "After the occasional manner of your kind, you have not truly and fully read the book you criticise." (Finch colored a little, for he remembered how he had bolted it raw in one greedy reading and never returned to it, trusting its entire contents, somewhat presumptuously, to his fine memory.) "I beg to remind you that Hawthorne meets your objection in advance. Nowhere does he show a profounder and more intimate knowledge of human nature than where he tells us how the minister's admirers and personal friends refused to believe that he had done anything wrong, in spite of his explicit confession. Their ears heard nothing from his lips but a short sermon, having no personal application to himself. To them the manner of his death was a parable, designed to convey the lesson that, in the view of infinite purity, we are all sinners alike. Their eyes did not see the flaming "A" which appeared to all others when he tore the ministerial band asunder. In the exact language of Hawthorne, as I recall it, "We must be allowed to consider this version of the story as only an instance of that stubborn fidelity with which a man's friends—

and especially a clergyman's—will sometimes uphold his character; when proofs as clear as the mid-day sun-shine on the scarlet letter establish him as a false and sin-stained creature of the dust." (The italics represent the significant emphasis which Wadlow laid on this passage.)

"*Piccavi! piccavi!* as you well say, you have me there, and I cry you mercy," rejoined Finch, who had by this time recovered from his momentary discomposure, and joined in the laugh against him which Meldrum and Wadlow were not quite magnanimous enough to forego. "I give up that point —a minor one, after all—and stand by the rest."

Meldrum now took his turn in disciplining the critic. "I am surprised, my dear fellow, that a doughty champion of the mild realistic school, like yourself, should not have fastened instinctively on that part of Hawthorne's story where he violates probabilities, and even human nature itself, to an extent that even Wadlow and myself cannot defend."

Finch opened his eyes widely. He had no idea of what was coming, and secretly hoped it was not some second exposure of his hasty reading and impulsive conclusion.

"I am referring not to what the Rev. Mr. Dimmesdale did to himself but to what he did to the procession. It was on its way, you recollect, from the

church to the town hall, where the banquet was to be served. Everybody knows how hungry one is made by long sermons, and Dimmesdale's election discourse that morning could not have been shorter than the good old regulation length of one hour and a half. Hawthorne speaks of the 'vast immeasurable tract of written space which composed it.' Now, here were all the dignitaries of Boston, valiant trenchermen every one, in an age when dyspepsia was unknown, headed by the ancients and honorables, whose prowess, then as now, shone most conspicuously at the dinner-table. All these empty, ravenous men, proceeding from a feast of reason to a more material and satisfying repast at a quick step, were compelled to stand in front of the pillory for an indefinite time and stay their stomachs with still another sermon. And, for all the novelist tells us, the procession missed the dinner altogether. Nothing more is heard of it. Now, if I were to pick holes in Hawthorne, I would say that he should have allowed the body of the procession, certainly the ancients and honorables and the governor and the councilors, whose appetites were not to be trifled with, to go on to their dinner; and he should have made up Dimmesdale's audience out of the hangers-on and the sidewalk spectators, who had no dinners to eat and could therefore not share the pangs of the bigwigs who had been saving them-

selves up for the occasion. How is that for an acute criticism, my friend?"

The speaker had pushed his irony almost to the point of offense; for, polite as he was by nature and training, he was apt to be vexed by the kind of criticism to which Finch was prone, when exercised upon any one of his select company of beloved authors. But the Bostonian had taken it all in good faith.

" You are a born critic yourself and must not decry your own craft again," said Finch, with energy. " The objection you make is original, neat, and unanswerable. The realists, of whom you are really one whatever you may say about them, would never have fallen into that mistake."

" The *naivete* of this remark was irresistible in its charm. Meldrum's face, which had been for the moment clouded, was again overspread by a smile. Then, dropping the subject with New York suddenness, and starting toward the door, he said, " Remember the sun was but little past the meridian when Dimmesdale made his confession and took his punishment. The more closely we keep to the text, the more complete will be our success."

So off they marched to the site of the tragedy, less than a minute's walk from Young's. At the east end of the old State House they paused, and Meldrum began to look about him earnestly.

CHAPTER XVII.

REAPPEARANCE OF THE SCARLET LETTER.

"HAVE you any doubt as to the precise location of the church and the pillory? I thought that was all settled," remarked Finch.

"Not the slightest doubt. That is a matter of fact, determined beyond question. I am only looking for a likely boy to play the bird game."

"What is the bird game?"

"It is a little trick that enables us to stand in the street of a crowded city for some minutes and look fixedly at any object, without attracting attention to ourselves. It is my own invention," continued Meldrum with pride, "and necessity was truly its mother. Wadlow and I worked it beautifully several times last summer in London, and since our return home we have adopted it with equally good results once or twice in New York."

"Describe it, please."

"Well, after we have reached the scene of our intended experiment, I pick up some loafer—a good-sized and mischievous boy preferred—and engage him to assist us, as follows: he is to stand in the street at a point convenient for our purpose and

draw a crowd there by keeping still and looking up at the top of some building or at a particular window, if the building is too high. In less than ten seconds he is sure to be joined by some other idler who invariably asks him what he is looking at. To this first question he always responds, 'There is a bird up there.' 'What kind of a bird?' asks the other fellow. 'I don't know,' answers the decoy. He is instructed, under penalty of forfeiting his pay, never to vary these replies by a single word. But there is no need of his saying much. The other loafers who collect around him as a nucleus soon do all the talking for him. They, in their turn, explain to the newcomers that 'There is a bird up there.' When asked 'What kind of a bird?' it is amusing to hear their replies. Some are natural liars, and deceive others for the love of deception. Others are merely imaginative and assume that the bird which persists in keeping out of sight must be rare and valuable to excite so much interest. Thus, in two minutes, it is successively a mocking-bird, or a pet canary, or a parrot, which is presumably a great loss to its owner, and for the return of which a liberal reward will surely be paid. Or else it is a crow, a hawk, an owl, or an eagle, that has lost its way in the night time and is bewildered among the chimney tops. In five minutes, at the utmost, from fifty to a hundred people will be gathered."

"And where do you come into the bird game?"

"We hang on the skirts of the crowd and take our fill of the scene we reproduce, undisturbed, for a quarter of an hour, perhaps. When the scene requires, as it sometimes does, a populace, as spectators, the crowd itself contributes to the illusion. We only have to imagine them clothed in the costume of the period, whatever it may be. Gray, steeple-crowned hats will be the feature to-day."

"But don't the police ever order your crowds to move on?"

"Never till we have accomplished our object. You see, the crowd is not badly behaved. It is a new dodge and the policeman himself does not understand it. His curiosity is aroused. He looks for the bird, too. Usually there is a person present who has good reasons for hating the police, and he improves on our game without charge. He pretends to see smoke coming out of the roof, or a man hiding behind a chimney—possibly an escaped lunatic or a fugitive from justice. Off goes the policeman to see what is the trouble up there, and the crowd has another respite, during which we steal away."

Just then, a tall, rawboned, much-patched boy caught Meldrum's eye. That practiced judge of character beckoned the urchin into a hallway, and the bargain for the bird game was struck with-

out delay. Never was juvenile accomplice better pleased with an engagement. He grinned with delight as he thought of fooling the people and still more, his natural enemy, the policeman.

As he crossed the open, paved space to the assigned point of operations, about fifteen feet from the north front of Brazer's building, he kept repeating to himself. "There's a bird up there," and "I don't know," in order to be perfect in his part.

What Meldrum predicted came true and always will come true. Before he could count ten, a street idler was standing by the side of the decoy and looking upward longingly. A third and a fourth followed, and they quadrupled the attractive power of the nucleus. Loafers rallied to it like iron filings to a magnet. A full minute had not passed and the desired crowd had been collected. At a signal from Meldrum, the three friends joined it at the outer edge. From this moment each one had to act for himself and act with rapidity. Finch had been carefully coached in the mode of procedure and could not have been further aided by Meldrum and Wadlow. To look after him would be only a distraction fatal to their own efforts. For the next ten minutes they forgot his existence, and he wisely forbore to remind them of it by so much as a nudge or a whisper.

While the crowd was staring up at the curved

stone parapet of Brazer's building, Meldrum and Wadlow had willed the building itself off the premises and erected in its stead a square, one-storied, thatched meeting-house. They did not stop to throw in windows and doors or other architectural details, which could be of no help to them. All they wanted of the meeting-house was to serve as a kind of accessory to the external platform which stood nearly beneath its eaves. This platform, ascended by steps from the street, was the one thing that must be most sharply defined at the outset. Meldrum and Wadlow were both in fine condition that day, and the platform stood before them in a twinkling, ready to bear the actors in the forthcoming tableaux. So clearly was it impressed on the minds of the two trained observers that they saw in the background the pillory itself, which Hawthorne mentions as standing there, but not in use. Had it pleased that enchanter to subject some violator of the Sabbath to disgrace and torture in that public place, as a side show to his tragedy, Meldrum and Wadlow would have distinctly seen the sad face of the offender protruding from the hole into which his neck was closely fitted, and silently imploring the spectators not to throw cabbage stumps at him.

In lieu of the Derby and other modern hats, battered and seedy most of them, which actually

met the level of their eyes, they saw, by metamorphosis, a cluster of peaked broad brims, like monstrous fungoid growths. Among the wearers of these they could easily have identified the historic Bellingham, had time permitted them to ticket the minor personages of the drama. They could have seen, conspicuous by its difference from the other headgear, the black skull cap crowning the white locks of the Rev. Mr. Wilson, whose benevolent face belied the ruthless austerity of his creed. But any interest they might have felt in the recreated knot of Puritans who jostled them, was wholly merged in the three figures which were now slowly climbing the steps to the stage of exposure and shame.

There was the erring minister, haggard, red-eyed, bent, tottering, who would have fallen but for the strong arm of Hester Prynne, which encircled him, and the support given him by her shoulder. She was beautiful, calm, erect, full of strength for the awful ordeal, a true type of woman forever bearing more than her share of contumely for the joint offense, and braving public scorn like a lioness if she may shield and comfort her lover. The nerveless fingers of the minister limply retained the hand of little Pearl, who knew the top of the platform too well to be frightened by what she might see there, and who had been stared at and shunned so long as

the unfathered child of Mistress Prynne, that she had no fear of facing any congregation of scowls and sneers. She seemed to be leading the way and helping her mother to keep her sin-stricken partner from falling.

Following them, with a stealthy footstep, came the aged and crabbed husband of the fair adulteress, he that is known in the pages of the Scarlet Letter as Roger Chillingworth. Such husbands do not receive from the world much sympathy, when their wives go astray, and, if he had been entitled to any, he had forfeited it by his merciless prolongation of the refined torture to which he had put Dimmesdale when he had fathomed the secret of that man's misery and remorse. Meldrum and Wadlow would gladly have stricken him from the scene, but he was an inseparable part of it. His eyes gleamed in their deep sockets with the fires of hate and baffled revenge, as he foresaw that his victim was about to escape him to peace by the way of confession which so many sinners have trod.

The effect of the spectacle could not have been heightened by hearing what Dimmesdale said to the astonished Puritans below him as he straightened himself with a great effort and unpacked his soul. Meldrum and Wadlow knew every word of it, and could follow him textually as his bloodless lips parted and closed and his bosom heaved, and the

whole man, save his arms and hands, which were otherwise occupied, vibrated with the passionate joy of unreserved confession. At the point of his speech where he cries “Lo! the scarlet letter which Hester wears,”— just before he bares his own breast to show the companion to it which he had branded there, in the vain attempt to sear and satisfy his own conscience by that act of self-punishment, — Meldrum and Wallow saw, for the first time, the capital “A” of red cloth fantastically embroidered with gold thread on Hester’s dress. Their thoughts had been so centered on the principal figure of the little group, that even the noonday sun, shining straight down on the scarlet letter, had not till then made it apparent to them.

The next moment the speaker had violently detached himself from the woman and child and stepped a pace in front of them, as if to protect them forevermore by taking upon himself all the shame which had hitherto been wholly heaped upon them. His ghastly face flushed as if with triumph; he stood erect; his lips opened widely as those of one speaking in trumpet tones; and then came the dreadful climax—the rending of the ministerial band and the exhibition of the scar of the scarlet letter deeply branded into his own tender flesh, which the devil would never more fret with the touch of his burning finger. Upon the death

cene which followed, Meldrum and Wadlow could hardly bear to look, so mournful and touching was that tableau of broken lives and bleeding hearts.

But, had they been disposed to glut their eyes on such miseries, they would have been balked in that design; for, at the instant when little Pearl knelt down and kissed the lips of the dying father she had but just found, there was a clang of alarm bells in State Street, and a steam fire engine, a hose cart, and a hook and ladder truck turned the corner on a gallop, and they barely escaped being run over by springing from the street to the sidewalk. Prospero, snapping his staff across his knee, could not have broken a spell more suddenly and completely. Gone were the thatched roof of the First Church and the adjacent pillory, and in their places stood Brazer's building and an express wagon, which had been sharply drawn up against the curb stone to make way for the fire engine and its satellites. Not only had the steeple-hatted Puritans taken flight, but the little crowd so successfully collected by the bird game had melted away.

Meldrum and Wadlow rubbed their eyes bewilderedly, so precipitate had been their fall from the height of two centuries. Recovering themselves, they recognized, close at hand, the lank and harlequin boy and Finch. The lad held out his hand to receive the residue of the stipend he had

so well earned. Closing his grimy fingers upon it, he ran away to spend it on cigarettes and the latest issue of the Boy Detective Series.

"What did you see?" asked Finch, eagerly.

"Everything," was the joint response. "And you?"

"Nothing."

"I am sorry for you," said Meldrum. "I told you so," was on his lips; but he was too much of a gentleman to utter it.

"You must not be discouraged by the first failure," added Wadlow, kindly. "Practice may enable you."

"To be candid, I fear not," Finch replied, with his habitual sweetness. "My place is in the crowd, diverting its eyes from you. I flatter myself that the boy had an able pal in me for the bird game."

The subject was renewed and discussed in the same spirit of frankness and good humor at the subsequent generous luncheon at Young's, provided by Finch as host of the occasion. Meldrum and Wadlow told him exactly what they had seen. Then it was agreed to give him the fullest range for questions.

"First," said Meldrum, "we invite the most rigid investigation of our claims. Examine us separately, if you please."

Finch lifted his hand in protest against any supposition that he could impugn the veracity of his friends. "I confess that, for my own enlightenment, I would like to put a few questions. You have explained to me that the scenes reproduced in these curious experiments are those which have been ineffaceably stamped on your minds by an enchanter in ideas and words. Visiting the places where these scenes are laid, you are enabled, by an exercise of will power, coupled with an entire surrender to what we may call the *genius loci* (for want of a better term), to transfer them from the chambers of the brain to the external world. Do I make myself clear?"

"There may be twenty ways of stating the proposition," said Wadlow, "but yours will answer."

"To begin with, then, what was the color of Hester Prynne's dress?"

Meldrum replied, without hesitation, "I did not notice. The only color I observed upon her was that of the Scarlet Letter."

"Ditto for me," added Wadlow, "though I now recall that Hawthorne expressly clad her in coarse gray cloth that day."

"And little Pearl's dress—what was its color?"

"Give it up," was Meldrum's answer.

"And I, too," said Wadlow, "which is strange, considering that the author always lays great stress

on the airy gayety of the child's apparel. He took the pains to tell us that on the morning of the tragedy, it was comparable only to the many-hued brilliancy of a butterfly's wing or the painted glory from the leaf of a bright flower. But it did not catch my eye, or Meldrum's, either, as it seems."

"No statement could better establish your credibility as witnesses," rejoined the examiner, with a laugh. "Everybody knows that men take no notice of women's and children's dresses—their color or fashion, or anything but their expense—when they are husbands and fathers. Now, let me ask you, what kind of a hat did Mr. Dimmesdale wear?"

"None," came from the lips of the two as one word. "And why?" continued Wadlow. "Simply because Hawthorne did not provide him with a hat for that or any other day. If the poor man had been fitted with a steeple crown, or a shovel shape, or a skull cap, I, for one, should have remarked it unconsciously."

"And I," echoed Meldrum. "If novelists don't supply their heroes with hats, we can't do it for them, you see."

"Good, so far," pursued Finch. "Now, tell me, which arm did Hester throw around her lover to support him as he ascended the steps?"

"The left," said Meldrum, emphatically.

"The right," said Wadlow, with equal positiveness.

"Let me say that that discrepancy between the witnesses is another proof that this is not a put up job," commented the interlocutor.

"In the absence of any instructions from the author, I had always imagined Hester to be on the minister's right. That would bring the child on his left, where she ought to be under good stage management." This from Meldrum.

It turned out that this arrangement had been reversed in Wadlow's mental picture of the same scene, because it had always occurred to him that Hester would naturally use her stronger arm, the right, to keep her lover from falling. His right hand would, therefore, be left free to clasp that of the sin-born child whose paternity he was about to acknowledge. This would put Pearl on her father's right when the three confronted the crowd. In the circumstances, Mr. Wadlow had always thought it a not-unsuitable placing of them.

As to Roger Chillingworth, these facts were elicited. That Wadlow had seen the old man a little to the left of his young wife at the moment when the other three persons had aligned themselves on the platform. But that Meldrum had located him for that tableau a step in the rear of Mr. Dimmesdale and Hester, his head alone being

visible between their shoulders. Hawthorne not having assigned him a specific place, each witness was obliged to adjust the man according to some preconception, the origin of which was unknown.

"I rest the case," said Finch, "and as both attorney and judge hereby express my entire confidence in the good faith of the witnesses. But it is quite another thing to realize for myself the truth of what they say. Be perfectly candid with me now. Why didn't I see any of the wonderful sights that you saw in front of Brazer's building? Is my terrible critical faculty, as you call it, my only drawback?"

Meldrum bethought himself of the proverb, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." Two or three times in his life it had been quoted at him as a prelude for some piece of fault-finding or rebuke, carrying in its tail a sting that struck deep and left a fester, such as jealousy or malice might have been well satisfied to inflict. Having himself suffered from the unsparing fidelity of friends, he did not abuse the license granted by Mr. Finch. He might have told that gentleman that he lacked imagination or was too conceited, and so disqualified from coming under the power of the enchanter. But, in lieu of these and other faithful wounds, he merely said, "You have the critical disposition in excess, my

dear fellow. That is all. Perhaps you will out-grow it in time."

"Felix and I were troubled the same way when we left college; but that was eight years ago, and you have been out only two years. Besides, you are heavily handicapped in one way, you know," said Wadlow.

"You mean as vice-principal of an old classical school?"

"Exactly. You find that the young people under you rate your literary abilities the more highly in proportion to the severity of your criticisms upon all authors. As long as you admire nothing, they think you know everything. I have known club men get the reputation of connoisseurs in wines by always swearing that there was not a drop in the house fit to drink. One man of that kind was called the best judge of cigars in New York, because none that the house committee could ever find suited him."

Finch smiled again. If he did not admit the imputation, he did not deny it.

"Have you any novel or essay or poem in hand?" asked Meldrum.

"Oh, no! I have never appeared in print, and have no thought of doing so. But why do you ask?"

"Because the question has a direct and most important bearing on the subject. While you are not

one of the critics so caustically, and, I must say as a class, unjustly described by Disraeli as men who have failed in literature and art, you nevertheless belong to a class, still more numerous and formidable, composed of those who have never attempted anything in literature and art. They have not the faintest idea of the immense difficulties encountered by one who aspires to produce a literary work at once original and impossibly perfect. Let them once try it themselves, and the result would perhaps make them more tolerant of the blemishes which disfigure the writings of the greatest authors."

"I kiss the rod, and thank you for letting me off so easily," cried the blithest and sunniest, if the most perversely critical, of hosts.

The cheerful manner in which Finch took his punishment, for such it was, though no one could have administered it more tenderly than Meldrum, impelled that judicious censor to say something deprecatory of himself and friend. When you have possibly wounded the *amour propre* of another person, there is no salve for the hurt like a little lowering of yourself in his eyes.

"The truth is," continued Meldrum, as if confidentially, "Wadlow and I are only the most commonplace and the humblest of hero-worshippers. We admit that an immeasurable distance lies between us and the authors of genuine creative power,

the originators of schools of poetry and novels, of whom alone I am now speaking. We are content to pay them a kind of blind adoration, if you please. We are grateful from the bottom of our hearts that we are living in an age that produced some of them, and that they are not all dead."

"We are so thankful for the pleasure they have given us," said Wadlow, cutting into the discourse, "that it seems the height of ingratitude to spy out their faults. For us, those faults do not exist. And when one of these great geniuses dies, in the fullness of his powers, we feel that we have sustained an irreparable personal loss. For then has come an end to the kind of work which, perhaps, he alone, out of all the hundreds of millions of men, could have done. If one would reflect a moment on the extreme rarity of truly original literary works of high order, he would hail them with delight when they appear at long intervals, instead of giving them, as too many persons do, a grudging welcome, or even brutally repelling them as if the authors, being newcomers, were intruders and not royal benefactors of the human race. Being born hero-worshipers, Meldrum and I know no better objects of our idolatry than the great novelists and poets."

"Who have, in our opinion," said Meldrum, taking his turn, "given more happiness to the world and done it more real good than the great states-

men, the great theologians and preachers, the great moralists, and even the great inventors. We are content to sit blindly enchanted at the feet of these rarest of great men. In return for our unalloyed faith and admiration, they give us about a half, or shall I say three fourths, of the pleasure of our lives, in reading their books over and over again, some of them."

"Besides private views of deaths on platforms in public streets. Pardon the interruption!" said Finch.

Meldrum had a dread of becoming tedious, and he, perhaps needlessly, took this remark as a hint to close what was tending to become a rhapsody.

"Excuse my enthusiasm," he said, "it was running away with me."

"In order to be admitted to the select company of the enchanted, one must be an enthusiast?" asked Finch.

"An enthusiast above all," was the simultaneous answer.

"Then there is no use of my applying," retorted Finch, with an expression of pride on his frank, handsome face, as if he had proclaimed the one excellence upon which he most plumed himself.

The two New Yorkers regretted that this fine fellow, to whom they had taken so strong a liking, should be debarred by his temperament and edu-

tion from sharing in the innocent, exalted pleasures to which they would gladly have admitted him as a companion in any future rambles they might take through New England on the track of Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Whittier, and Holmes. But such comradeship was plainly out of the question, now that Finch's unfitness to be a practicable third had been proved by trial and confessed with a fullness that left no room to hope for its removal.

But Meldrum and Wadlow clasped the hand of their kind friend and hospitable entertainer no less warmly, and expressed the hope to meet him in New York, at an early day, no less sincerely, when he parted from them at the station, where they took the three o'clock train for home. They valued Finch for what he was: a genial, companionable man, a good fellow and a stanch friend, whose misfortune more than his fault it was that the place which enthusiasm should have held in his nature was usurped by a critical demon who could not be exorcised.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FORTUNATE HAPPENINGS OF A JOURNEY WEST.

AN evening paper, bought in the train that day, gave to Wadlow one of the greatest pleasures of his life. Fortune might have many good things in store for his professional future, but never could she duplicate the rapture he felt on winning his first important case at the bar, single-handed, against distinguished veterans. The New York Court of Appeals had reversed the decision of the lower court on a difficult law point and vindicated his wisdom and persistence in urging his client to fight it out at any cost. His client was one of the great life insurance companies, whose young and able president was a warm personal friend of Wadlow, and had put this case in his charge as a special auxiliary counsel. The old regular attorneys of the corporation had advised a compromise, and the president had small hopes of gaining the suit, which involved a large sum of money, besides a principle never before adjudicated upon. But Wadlow, after carefully examining all the papers, took a less discouraging view, and now the highest court of the State had justified his faith, sagacity, and courage, all of

which good qualities were largely drawn upon in persuading his friend not to yield at each successive reverse in the protracted litigation.

The next morning, on reaching his dingy little office in the Van der Tromp building, Wadlow received a note from the delighted president of the great insurance company, congratulating him on his brilliant victory and offering him the highly-salaried position of chief counsel of the corporation, which had become vacant by death during Wadlow's absence abroad. Thus, at a bound, he sprang from a hand-to-mouth practice into the enjoyment of one of the most valuable prizes which can fall to the share of a young New York lawyer.

He was hardly warm in his new seat—a deep, high-backed, softly-padded, luxurious arm-chair—before the company received notice of a case connected with its branch office at Duluth, Minn., which, by reason of its novelty and the large interests at stake, seemed to require the presence of the cool head and iron nerve of the new chief counsel.

Upon being notified of the trip and the duty, Wadlow remembered with pleasure that Duluth is situated not far from St. Paul, and he foresaw the opportunity of visiting that city and, perchance, of being favored by another sight of his preference among all heroines—Amy Robsart; for by that name Amanda Robison always rose to his mind.

Not inflammable, not highly impressible, but, on the contrary, judicious and circumspect as became one destined to attain high rank in his profession, Wadlow was yet conscious of sweetly disturbing pulsations whenever he recalled the brown hair and eyes, the pure complexion, the oval, regular-featured face, and the supple figure of that lady. He had not seen her since they parted on the Wengern Alp. But accident had befriended him to the extent of opening up communication with her, and receiving in reply a prettily worded little note, which he kept in a pigeon-hole quite apart from any of his grave law papers. It happened in this wise:

When Meldrum and Wadlow, after some days' delay at Interlaken, pursued their journey to Lucerne, they stopped at the Schweizerhof. Looking idly through the bundle of telegrams which were awaiting delivery to guests of the house, Wadlow found one stamped, "International Cable Service," and addressed to Miss Amanda Robison. A telegram from America to Europe may be safely assumed to be of some importance to the destined recipient; and he at once made it his business to ask why it had not been forwarded to the lady, whose next address had doubtless been left at the bureau of the hotel. In reply, he was told that she had failed to leave the needed information on her departure, or, more probably, her courier had neg-

lected to do it for her. Two or three letters, with American postmarks, bearing her name, were also discovered. It was fortunate for her that Wadlow had made this find, for, with the single exception of Meldrum, there was no one at the hotel who had chanced to observe, in reading the *Galignani* of that morning, among the "Personals," that the arch widow and her friend were then sojourning at the Hotel Metropole, Geneva. Wadlow at once inclosed the letters and the telegram in a large envelope, with his own card (penciling below his name and his address, "Schweizerhof, Lucerne," and, furthermore, the two words "Wengern Alp," as a hint at his identity, which he trusted that so bright a young lady would not fail to catch), supercribed it with the proper address, and stamped and mailed it with his own hand. But in the haste to do this friendly act, he had not omitted to make a slight verbal correction on the face of the telegram and likewise on one of the letters.

There are many people who think that the spelling of other names than their own is of no sort of consequence. Carelessness, and not design, may be supposed to be the explanation of those slips by which middle names or initials are dropped out, and even a sacred surname is docked, lengthened, or otherwise changed, to the annoyance of its lawful owner. Now, Miss Amanda Robison, like her father

before her (but not her grandfather, to be frank), always took great pains to write her name so plainly, that all who read it could not help seeing that it was not Robinson. Type could not have made it more legible than she did. In spite of these and other precautions, intended for the permanent exclusion of that impertinent letter of the alphabet, there were actually persons, calling themselves friends, who would interpolate the “*n*.” As for the rest of man and womankind, no recognition of the tremendous difference between the two names was ever expected, and Miss Amanda Robison had become compulsorily reconciled to it.

It was one of Wadlow’s peculiarities to be observant of names and punctilious in spelling them. From the time when he ascertained from the waiters and post-boys of the Kenilworth Inn exactly how the lady’s name was spelled (they had read it in large painted letters on her trunks), it ran no more risk of being transformed by him to Robinson than to Jackson or Peterson or Williamson. Deeming such trifling with patronymics a marked breach of good manners, he did as he would be done by. He obliterated the superfluous and offensive “*n*” on the telegram and on the letter by a boldly penciled X. And he was very careful in addressing the package himself to dot the “*i*” plainly and make the following “*s*” conspicuous, so that

there could be no possible room for mistake about it.

A few days afterward came a sweet little note from the lady, thanking him warmly for his thoughtfulness. She explained that the telegram gave her immense relief from anxiety. For it assured her of the convalescence of her dear old grandmother, whose illness had been so alarming that Miss Robison had made all her preparations to return home alone. Now she had been telegraphed to remain abroad as long as she pleased, as there was no doubt of her grandmother's speedy recovery. This was signed, out of the fullness of her heart, "Yours gratefully, Amanda Robison." Indeed, it was a proper occasion for gratitude, and nothing more than that was conveyed between the lines, though Wadlow searched for something else in those blank spaces many and many a time. And yet, all the while, it was there in the form of a very decided regard for a man as good-looking, sensible, modest, and well-bred as Wadlow, and so nice also in another respect. For Miss Robison had noted with pleasure the accurate spelling of the address in his own hand and the bold erasure of the obnoxious "n" in the two instances referred to, by the same pencil evidently which had been employed on that gentleman's inclosed card.

Though Wadlow could not surmise to what

extent Miss Robison would be pleased to see him again, he was fairly entitled to think that she would at least be polite to him when they next met. Had he been less well-balanced, he might have persuaded his friend to deflect from his line of travel through Germany and run down to Geneva, with the hope of meeting the lady or of following her up till they should meet. Meldrum, though not susceptible to the charms of even the archest and richest of widows, would have consented to this alteration of plans without much pressing. But Wadlow concluded, on reflection, that the proposed pursuit of the two charming Americans would lower himself and friend too near to the level of the titled admirers and fortune hunters who were still in hot pursuit of the widow (all the continental papers containing frequent reference to the fact). And so he resolutely smothered his rising inclination to see Miss Robison once more in Europe all the more easily, because he felt a strong presentiment that that privilege would be his, some day, in America.

And now there was a possibility that he might soon taste the deferred pleasure, for the New York journals had, within a day or two, trumpeted the return of Mrs. Josiah J. Greatfield—"The Flour Queen; the Minneapolis millionairess,"—from her brilliant European tour; "still heart-whole and unpreempted we are glad to say;" "her belt filled

with the scalps of her conquests," etc., etc. One paper declared: "We have it on the best authority that she has refused one Bourbon prince, two French dukes, four Italian marquises, six German counts, and two English lords;" and patriotically added, "American husbands are good enough for Mrs. Josiah J. Greatfield." Such were a few of the phrases in which the reporters strove to do justice to the wealth and social position of that lady. A line, in the same connection, sufficed to mention the return, safe and sound, in her company, of Miss Amanda Robinson (always Robizson in the papers), of St. Paul, "the fair proprietress of the magnificent Opera House of that city." Wadlow, while thinking no less of Mrs. Greatfield because the press had taken such liberties with her, was, on the whole, pleased (though it was really no business of his) that the other lady had been made the subject of no such "journalistic enterprise."

When Wadlow told his best of friends of his intended visit to the principal cities of Minnesota, Meldrum expressed a wish to accompany him, thereby anticipating the request the other was about to make. "When we are at St. Paul, you know," said Meldrum, "we can try our luck on some scene from Hiawatha—say at Minnehaha Falls—where a part of the action of the poem takes place."

Wadlow had not thought of that, so engrossed had he been with the sole desire of meeting Miss Robison again.

"Ye—yes," he replied, "I was on the point of mentioning the same thing."

It is painful to reflect that such duplicity in the form of secretive reserve should be practiced by any person to the most confiding of friends. But it is true that Wadlow was unwilling to tell even Meldrum the real object of his side trip to the capital of Minnesota. As for the latter, he was perfectly sincere when he added, as an afterthought, "And may be we shall see the widow and Amy Robsart again, there or thereabout. That would be pleasant, wouldn't it?"

Wadlow readily admitted that it would. He knew, from his friend's manner, that the widow was not occupying any part of his thoughts, save as a sprightly variety of womankind which Meldrum liked to study with the mingled interest and composure of the popular but predetermined and fore-armed bachelor.

The business at Duluth having been put in satisfactory train, the two friends proceeded to Minneapolis. On their way thither they observed freight cars, piled high with the Balloon brand of Family Flour, outward bound. As they neared the city,

the board fences adjoining the railroad were radiant with great colored placards announcing the engagement of the Italian Grand Opera Company at the Robison Grand Opera House, St. Paul, for three nights only. These little incidents were the most enlivening of the trip. They confirmed, as only such realistic evidence can, those newspaper paragraphs, the very repetition of which, somehow, seems to increase their improbability. Meldrum looked tranquilly at the passing heaps of flour, merely regretting the absence of the widow's name from the head of the barrels. But Wadlow felt a pang as he measured with his eye the length of the letters composing the word "Robison" on the flaming posters. It was a familiarity bordering on profanation.

Arrived at Minneapolis, they stopped at "The West," on the strength of the widow's emphatic eulogium of that hotel.

It is a good and safe plan in every city of the world, which a tourist may visit, to take The Drive. No matter how large the city may be, there is only one The Drive in it. By adopting it without question, and leaving one's self unreservedly in the hands of the coachman, one is sure to see the best park that the place can show, with rides along lakes, ponds, or rivers, if any, including views of the finest residences in the fashionable quarter, with a cer-

tainty (if it is the season and the right hour of the day is chosen) of seeing Everybody—since Everybody invariably takes The Drive at the same time. If Mrs. Greatfield was at Minneapolis, there was the same assurance of meeting that prominent society personage in the course of The Drive on a brilliant November afternoon, as if an appointment had been made for it. Both Meldrum and Wadlow expressed the hope that a sight of her fresh, laughing face would be among the pleasures in reserve for them; the former adding that, of course, there could “be no such luck as finding Amy Robsart with her,” to which Wadlow responded, suppressing a sigh, “I suppose not.”

Nevertheless, it did happen that, as they were skirting the Mississippi at a point where they got a fine view of St. Anthony’s Falls, they saw approaching a span of high steppers, and perched above them a portly coachman, close-shaven, rubicund, English; and just over his seat appeared the brilliantly bonneted heads of Mrs. Josiah J. Greatfield and Miss Amanda Robison. They were leaning back in an open landau, with that set and solemn expression of face which Everybody wears on The Drive, and which is only momentarily relaxed into a mechanical smile in recognition of one’s friends by the way. But there was no pulling of muscles like strings to produce the smile which illumined the

faces of both ladies (and a bit of a blush thrown in for the maiden) when the two carriages came closer. The raising of two hats was responded to by the dipping of two parasols. At a signal from the widow, the carriage stopped in the middle of the wide road and the other team drove alongside of it.

"Let us make no mystery of it," said the widow, who was the first to speak. "Though we have never been formally introduced, you know perfectly well who we are and we know who you are. We have read about you in the papers, ha, ha!"

The widow's allusion, here, was to a paragraph which had appeared in the Duluth *Hustler*, and been copied by the journals of the Twin Cities, highly complimentary to the personal and professional character of Wadlow. The facts of it had been obligingly supplied to the reporter of the *Hustler* by Meldrum, who had been sought out, in the absence of his friend, for an interview upon the subject. Much interest attached to Wadlow's visit to Duluth on account of his known relations as chief counsel to the Universe Life Insurance Company. The legal question at issue there affected many policy-holders in the company, not only at Duluth but all through Minnesota. The reporter not being able to extract from Meldrum any personal data concerning himself, had ventured on his

own responsibility to speak of him as a "gentleman" and a "scholar," "well known and highly respected in New York"--a generalization quite safely drawn from his face, manner, and attire.

The widow's child-like laugh showed how keenly, at times, she enjoyed setting conventionalities aside. But trust her not to do so for men who would for a moment presume on her kindly relaxation of social rigors! For such she had snubs in keeping, of which one was a full dose for an adult.

Meldrum and Wadlow gratefully acknowledged the ladies' goodness in recalling them to mind. It is so easy and almost natural for people to drop at home the casual acquaintances they make abroad. Then followed a rattling fire of reminiscences about their European trip and other pleasant nothings. The object all around was not to stop talking, under cover of which Wadlow made an inspection of the visible charms of Miss Robison. She had a heightened color, partly tan and the rest a pleasurable flush. The Atlantic voyages, forth and back, had produced the not uncommon result of plumping the figure at points where the typical American girl falls a little short of the sculptor's ideal and does not quite meet the reasonable views of her young fellow countrymen. Altogether, a change from very good to better. No such improvement had been needed in the widow. She remained, as she had

first been seen by Meldrum, who was mentally comparing notes with himself, the same pleasing combination of curves which sank at one point only to swell at another.

"Now, gentlemen," said the widow, abruptly; "I am going to press you into service for opinions. Please follow my carriage." This, in a way that relieved the request of all singularity. It was one of her gifts that the strangest thing she did excited no surprise.

Meldrum and Wadlow declared themselves entirely at her command, and their carriage fell into line behind hers.

After a pleasant little drive along the river bank, passing new and handsome houses, which marked the prosperous extension of the city, Mrs. Greatfield signaled a stop in front of a large, unoccupied lot of ground, picturesquely situated. The gentlemen followed the ladies in descending from their carriage and passing into this fine piece of land through a gateway. Arriving at the center of the tract the widow paused, and asked, "How is this for a building site?"

Meldrum said, "Magnificent;" and Wadlow, "Superb; just the place for a private residence."

"And that is why I think it none too good for a woman's business college," returned Mrs. Greatfield, with a glow of pride, "though the trustees

don't agree with me. They never do, when I propose any little scheme of benevolence for my fellow creatures. But I shall have my own way here." She patted the ground with her foot and pursed her lips in the most determined manner. "The plan covers two objects," she continued, with a pretty seriousness. "In the first place, the country is filling up with widows and spinsters (a sly glance at Miss Robison) who have money, which a great many other people want to get away from them. (There was nothing of cynicism in the widow's manner. She spoke as if only mentioning an undeniable fact.) Everybody presumes upon their weakness and ignorance, and, shall I say, their sweetly confiding natures? ha, ha! to advise them about investments. Whether this advice is interested or disinterested, the result is equally bad if the money is lost in buying cats and dogs, as Mr. Greatfield used to call 'em." She paused to catch her breath and went on. "Now, I don't see why these unprotected females, who depend at present on trustees, lawyers, bankers, possibly clergymen, and, undoubtedly, brothers, for advice about money matters, should not be taught to manage their affairs for themselves, just as well as you hard-headed men do."

"Which is not saying much for some of us," said Mceldrum.

"In business matters men are apt to be more foolish than women, according to my experience," added Wadlow.

"I dare say," said the widow, laughingly. "I know that Mr. Greatfield had a pretty poor opinion of men's business capacity, but then he was uncommonly sharp himself. But I think you will agree with me that there is a growing class of women in America who do need, for their safety, to be instructed in sound and approved business methods. Men who lose their money through ignorance or overconfidence ought to know better; for they have the chance of seeing and knowing how business is done. But American women, at least, have few such opportunities. It is these I would furnish at the Woman's Business College. There, now, what do you say to it? Is it all 'nonsense,' 'moonshine,' 'chimerical,' 'visionary,' as the trustees tell me?"

"Admirable," answered Meldrum, "and feasible—that is, if the widows and maiden ladies will take your strictly sensible view of it and become students at the college."

"And if they don't, that will be their loss. The Woman's Business College is going to be built all the same, as I will presently explain under my 'secondly.'"

"It will take clients from me, I have no doubt,"

said Wadlow, "but I am with you heart and soul in any project to teach what we will call the income-class of American ladies, to understand and apply business principles to their private affairs. They are now altogether too much at the mercy of men, whom they amiably trust; but who, when honest, are often less competent even than themselves to take care of money."

"Thanks, both," exclaimed the widow, with great glee. "Still, keeping to the first branch of my subject, since you encourage me, I propose to endow a full faculty of professors - all white-haired and venerable, of course - ha, ha! - who shall give lectures and teach by example. There will be professors of book-keeping by double and single entry. There will be a law professor to lecture on wills, contracts, powers of attorney, promissory notes, indorsements, and all that sort of thing."

"Just the chair for my legal friend here," interrupted Meldrum, "if he were not disqualified by your requirements about white hair and venerableness."

"Perhaps we will make an exception in his case," said the widow, joining in the general laugh.

Wadlow expressed his delight and bound himself to deliver a course of twelve lectures on contracts, free, if invited.

"Breach of promise included?" asked the widow archly.

"That above all; for there the ladies always have my fullest sympathies," was the gallant reply.

"My most important professorship," resumed the widow, "will be that of investments. The man I have in view for that place is head book-keeper in an old stock commission house. He knows from experience the humbug and the danger of investments in general. He believes in nothing but first mortgages on city property, government, state, municipal, gas and water bonds - what he calls gilt-edge securities - where, if you don't make so much, you can always get your money back."

"Your college will never be popular with mining companies and stockbrokers," remarked Wadlow.

"It is against them, particularly, that I am going to start it. I have been there myself! ha, ha!"

It may here be said, that before Meldrum and Wadlow left Minneapolis they learned from well-informed residents that the widow herself needed no course of lectures at her proposed college. Soon after the death of the lamented "King Miller," as he was called, she had been the prey of numberless schemers and sponges, and at last, in self-defense, had studied and mastered, with her quick mind, the elementary principles of business. It was firmly believed in the community that she could manage her flour mills better than the trustees, if they would let her.

"May I make a suggestion," inquired Meldrum, with mirth in his eye.

"I invite it."

"Establish a professorship of No—N—O—No; always NO!"

"But the women who will come to my college know how to say 'no' already pretty well, I think. Ha, ha!"

"Doubtless," was the response, as Meldrum placed his hand upon his heart, "and many are the sufferers in consequence. But while they can say 'No' in fifty ways to keep off an undesirable suitor, they say 'Yes,' too often in business matters, when 'No' should be the one and only word, stuck to first, last, and every time. A professor might brace them up a bit just there."

"I will make a note of it," said Mrs. Greatfield, who welcomed original ideas for her pet institution.

Whatever might be said of the feasibility of the first part of the scheme as hereinbefore outlined, there could be no question that the second part, which the widow then proceeded to explain, was entirely practical. This was to give free tuition for two hundred young women, who should be instructed in book-keeping, the duties of cashiers, and all the higher grades of accounting and money handling required in any business establishment whatever. The course of instruction, without

charge, would be as full as could be had, for pay, at the best men's business college in the United States. She believed, and she was right,—her observations in Europe confirming her in it,—that women have the natural capacity of becoming readier, more accurate, and neater book-keepers than men ; and that their innate honesty, fidelity, and freedom from vices make them more trustworthy than men in places where the temptations for embezzlement are strong. She ardently hoped that her college would fit a large number of women every year to take such responsible positions at good salaries, and thus to enlarge the self-supporting area of her sex. She should depend on the tuition money and lecture fees of the richer class of students, specified under the first head, to pay in part the running expenses of the college. But the remainder she was ready to provide out of her own pocket.

So sensible and discreet had Meldrum and Wadlow proved themselves in their treatment of this scheme as unfolded, that before carriages were resumed, in different directions, the widow had invited the gentlemen to call at her house that evening and see the architect's plans of the college. Mrs. Greatfield was well qualified by her knowledge of human nature (the male variety in especial) to fill a chair of that difficult science ; and she might have done much worse than to found one, with her

self as the incumbent, for the instruction of moneyed widows and spinsters. No flattering introductions from any third parties could have procured for Meldrum and Wadlow a greater degree of confidence than she justly reposed in them on her own judgment. She knew by instinct and experience that they were not fortune-hunters, and that the elder of them was not cherishing any, even the remotest, designs upon herself; though she had no doubt from certain poorly-concealed tokens that the younger was "interested" (which is the mild term used at that early stage of the complaint) in Miss Robison, and, furthermore, she happened to know that that lady was more kindly disposed toward Wadlow than toward any other man she had ever met.

A pleasant evening was passed at the widow's house (one of the finest in Minneapolis) in that interchange of impressions of travel which, perhaps, affords the shortest of all known cuts to close acquaintanceship. This was helped along by those accidental contacts of hands, which result from the shuffling and inspection of mounted photographs. The ground plans and elevations of the proposed college required a good deal of careful study, with much indication of points by fingers more or less tapering. So that, when Meldrum and Wadlow rose to go, at an hour for the lateness of which they

apologized, nothing seemed more natural to the four than an arrangement for visiting Minnehaha Falls the next day and assembling again at night in Miss Robison's private box at her Opera House, where the season was to open with "Lucia."

CHAPTER XIX.

WITH LONGFELLOW AT MINNEHAHA FALLS.

In the language of the guide books, Minnehaha Falls have been "immortalized" by Longfellow. The idea of conferring immortality upon a waterfall will perhaps not bear cold analysis. But the uncritical reader accepts the statement of the compilers of those works as a concise tribute to the power of an enchanter. When the admirer of "Hiawatha" first sees the Falls of Laughing Water, he sees them (unless he willfully hardens his heart against first impressions) through the prism of that beautiful poem.

"Charming," "lovely," "very fine," were some of the trite words that came unsummoned to the lips of the two friends as they stood by the side of the silent ladies at a point favorable for observation. A pair of brown eyes sparkled with pleasure at these encomiums. Miss Robison always felt some apprehension in showing off the Falls to her friends "from the East," lest they should say something disparaging of them, or come too far short of her own admiration of them as a native and land owner of St. Paul. In her capacity of Minneapolitan, Mrs.

Greatfield was no less anxious for the good opinion of her guests on this ticklish point ; for the Falls of Minnehaha are situated about half way between the Twin Cities and are the one thing concerning whose grandeur they do not dispute.

"You said last night, that you would try to realize some scene from 'Hiawatha,' to show us how you do it. Miss Robison and I are just dying to see it done. Of course, poor creatures like ourselves haven't imagination enough to do it, too."

Meldrum and Wadlow had already decided that the widow's peculiar temperament unfitted her for the fanciful task. But they held another opinion about Miss Robison. One of them was anxious to subject her to a test. And they had privately concocted a little scheme to that end.

"Please do," urged that young lady.

Both gentlemen expressed their eagerness to make an experiment of the kind, and their hope, if not exactly belief, that it would prove successful. Wadlow pulled a copy of "Hiawatha" from his pocket and thumbed its pages with a hypocritical pretense of searching for something, just as if the very passages to be illustrated had not been chosen by them last night before retiring.

"Ah, I have it!" said he, at length. "There is the tableau of the Ancient Arrow-maker and his daughter Minnehaha, at the door of his wigwam,

which was pitched, the poet tells us, within sight of these very falls. How shall we cast the characters?"

"I'll be the Ancient Arrow-maker," cried Meldrum, as if the thought were impromptu.

"And who should be Minnehaha but myself?" exclaimed the widow, with a succession of ha, ha's! which sounded like the echo of the Indian maiden's name. "Let me be Laughing Water; ha, ha!"

"You fit the part exactly," said Wadlow.

"And what will you and Miss Robison be doing?" asked the widow.

"The poet leaves us nothing to do but look on and try to realize the scene between you and my friend," explained Wadlow. "We will consider the performance for the benefit of Miss Robison. I will coach her, if she will let me, in the art and mystery of conjuring up and giving reality to the vivid descriptions of the poet. When one learns how to do it, no such assistance as you and Mr. Meldrum will lend is needed, as we explained to you last night. Given the locality where the scene is laid, it is reproduced easily enough—with practice."

"I am eager to learn," said Miss Robison, who had been deeply interested in what she had heard of the brilliant work of this kind performed by the two gentlemen and believed herself a "subject" only needing development.

"Beginners should have every help possible to assist in creating the illusion," said Meldrum. "If there was only something to represent a wigwam."

"There used to be a little summer-house just over that knoll," remarked Mrs. Greatfield, pointing to a rise of ground. "Let us see."

The four walked along a path, chatting as they went, and were delighted to find a rustic kiosk, commanding a good side view of the falls, and, what was more to the purpose, deserted just then. It was a round structure, with a conical roof, and, so far, not wholly unlike the Indian wigwam of pictures.

"A piece of luck," cried Meldrum. "And there is nobody in sight. Now for the experiment, before we are overrun with spectators."

In his part of the Ancient Arrow-maker (whose Indian name Longfellow withholds) Meldrum had only to sit at the door of the supposed wigwam and chip arrow-heads. In personating Minnehaha, Mrs. Greatfield was merely required to look handsome and to be plaiting mats of flags and rushes. She must be seated by her father's side. Opposite the entrance to the hut was a narrow flat rock, which served for both, without crowding. Meldrum picked up two small fragments of stone at his feet and began to strike one against the other, after the manner of the primeval savage shaping his

arrow-heads. Mrs. Greatfield, with equal adaptiveness, broke off the dry stalks of some tall, slender weeds near her and made the motions of plaiting them. It only remained for the two observers, stationed a hundred feet away, to build up the Ancient Arrow-maker and his lovely daughter out of these scanty materials.

"How about the Indian man's clothes?" asked Miss Robison, with some misgivings. "Longfellow does not describe them."

"For November," said Wadlow, "I should put him into a medium suit of light-tanned deer skin. But anything will do. Carry out your own idea of an Indian as nearly as possible."

Miss Robison's own idea of an Indian, formed by seeing specimens at stations on the Pacific Railroad, was of an ugly man in a dirty blanket with a battered stove-pipe hat, carrying a bottle of whisky. She was afraid that she could not do much with the costume of the Ancient Arrow-maker; but she said, "Thanks, I will try."

"Of course, Minnchaha is the important figure. Perhaps, in turn, you can help me there," remarked Wadlow.

"About her dress, my ideas are clearly made up," was the quick reply. "I copy it from the one worn by Pocahontas in the play of that name. Did you ever see it?"

"Oh, yes. That will do admirably." And Wadlow recalled a rainbow-medley of bright-dyed cloths, beads, ribbons, and feathers. As a costume for Minnehaha it was an obvious, if delightful, anachronism, because those adornments could not possibly have been known to Indian belles in the traditional days of Hiawatha. But Wadlow was bound to aid his fair companion in every way, and it would never do to unsettle any harmless preconception of details, however erroneous, which she might have formed. For his own part, as a simpler task, he did not propose to dress the heroine at all. He trusted that Mrs. Greatfield's costume—*itself* of flowing lines and neutral tints—would turn into a simple, quiet, appropriate garment for Minnehaha, as the widow herself gradually changed under his eye to the Indian maiden in obedience to his powerful wishing.

"One word of caution," said Wadlow, gently. "You must keep your eyes fixed on the figures and shut out all disturbing sights and thoughts. Are you ready?"

"Yes," was the whispered reply.

As they stood there, in graceful attitudes, slightly bent forward, about a yard apart, they were a fine-looking couple. So the widow thought as she stole a glance at them, while still busily weaving her imaginary mat. Meldrum, more strictly attentive

to business, did not look up, but struck sparks from the stones as he dashed them together with industrious fury.

His practice of this kind of feat enabled Wadlow to perform it with great rapidity. The low uttered "yes" (how sweetly she breathed it) was still ringing in his ears, when he had the desired tableau completed before his eyes. At any other time he would have dwelt upon it till the strain of the exertion began to fatigue him. But on this occasion he abruptly terminated the vision, in order to see, with a side eye, how Miss Robison was getting on. This he did without any motion of his body or his head, so that she was unaware of his scrutiny.

There she stood, a beautiful living statue. Her face was sweetly grave, her full lips parted as of one in rapt contemplation, her eyes wide open. She was like an innocent child gazing at an entralling scene of some play, but her form was that of a woman in its first perfection. Altogether, a charming neophyte of the new school of the enchanted. Wadlow, in the thrall, would have looked at her as long as she looked at the tableau. But, unfortunately for both of them, the jolly widow could stand suppression no longer. "Ha, ha, ha! It's too ridiculous! Ha, ha!" And she flung down her handful of braided weeds and plunged into the sum-

mer-house, where she could be heard trying to stifle laughter with a handkerchief.

"That is too bad, Carrie," cried Miss Robison, as she seemed to come out of a semi-trance, "just as I was getting you all right—"

"You saw Minnehaha plainly?" asked her delighted instructor.

"In a minute more I would have had her dress complete. There were a good many feathers and ribbons and things to look after, you know; and the wampum bracelets were rather confusing, as I was not sure how many Pocahontas had on."

Wadlow, in the capacity of professor, assured his lovely pupil that she had made a splendid beginning. Practice would soon render her perfect in a difficult art. But he warned her laughingly that less time must be spent on minutiae of costume. General effects were all that should be aimed at.

"It is all very well for you men to say that. But we women can't help paying strict attention to such trifles, as you call them."

As Wadlow glanced at her perfectly fitting tailor-made dress and remarked the exquisite matching of her gloves, hat, and parasol, he admitted the truth of her assertion, and mentally recanted some opinions he had crudely formed, as a bachelor, as to the comparative unimportance of artistic scrupulosity in female attire.

"I will win her," he said to himself, illogically, and, before he could resume the dialogue, the widow, who had finally choked off her explosions, emerged from the kiosk, and cried out, "Turn about is fair play. You two make up the next tableau, and Mr. Meldrum will give me a lesson."

"Agreed," said everybody.

The next tableau, if one keeps to the book, is composed of three figures: the Ancient Arrow-maker and Minnehaha as before, reinforced by Hiawatha, who comes a-wooing. But Meldrum, being necessarily detached as spectator and coach for the widow, was out of the cast. But Wadlow did not mind that, and Miss Robison made no objection to it. She only hoped that "Carrie" would be as successful as herself, and promised her that she would not spoil everything with a horrid laugh.

Meldrum, as manager, gave some general stage directions. Then he and Mrs. Greatfield took their assigned positions and the performance proceeded.

Miss Robison picked up the partly woven stalks which the widow had thrown aside, seated herself on the flat stone, and fell to work on her mat. To her comes Wadlow, as Hiawatha. He is supposed to be carrying across his broad shoulders a red deer which he throws to the ground before her, as a propitiatory offering, apparently. He does not say

a word. But Minnehaha looks up at him from her weaving and says, in gentle accents, "You are welcome, Hiawatha." In tableaux, as everybody knows, nothing is said. In lieu of words, attitude and looks must tell the story. That story was of love on both sides. How could it be better told than by the language of the eyes? When Wadlow made a graceful gesture as of casting down the deer, he stood erect as became a noble savage and fastened his deep black eyes on the brown ones of Minnehaha.

"Please keep perfectly still a moment, for the effect on *them*," he whispered, in a stage-aside. As she was returning his ardent gaze just then, in the conscientious execution of her rôle, it was a little awkward not to be allowed to move a muscle or even wink. But she was very anxious to help on Mrs. Greatfield and she dutifully obeyed her preceptor. This arrangement left a pair of large black eyes looking intently into a pair of large brown ones and *viv versa*. Both of these young people had read somewhere that the "eyes are the mirror of the soul"; but they never knew it as a vital truth till then, when they saw straight through those half-suffused, half-glowing orbs into that inner self where secrets stand confessed, stripped of their last veil. It was love on both sides, fresh and sweet as the morning and tingling in the veins like the wine

of heaven. Forgotten were their mimic parts; forgotten their own identity. They were the primal man and woman searching each other's hearts by looks a hundred times more eloquent than words.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the widow, unable to contain herself any longer. "Looking on is even funnier than performing. The great big eyes you have been making at each other!"

This ill-timed mirth dissolved the tableau, much to the vexation of the two performers, which they tried to hide with the poor semblance of a laugh in echo of the widow's.

On comparing notes afterward, it turned out that Mrs. Greatfield had seen nothing as it should have been seen. "But one thing I will claim," said she, "I am the original and only genuine Minnehaha." And she authenticated her pretension to the title by peals of laughter which drowned the music of the cataract.

Meldrum had been fortunate as usual, though his function as coach to the widow had barely left him time to snatch one good view for himself.

The two persons most gratified with the experiments, in their double capacity of spectators and performers, were Miss Robison and Wadlow. On their return ride to Minneapolis, they were both quite contented and happy, as they dwelt on the pleasure that Longfellow, the enchanter, had given

them that day. Mrs. Greatfield was always good enough to supply small talk when other people chose to be silent. And Meldrum, equally obliging, seconded the widow's efforts at conversation. Between them they fully made good the shortcomings of the other two. It would have been decidedly awkward if all four had been introspective and mute together; but there was nothing in the hearts of the widow and of the sworn bachelor opposite her to check their garrulity.

CHAPTER XX.

AN END AND A BEGINNING.

IN order to avail themselves most easily of Miss Robison's invitation to seats in her private box that night, Meldrum and Wadlow had moved over from "The West," Minneapolis, to "The Ryan," St. Paul. Though it is quite practicable to remain as guest at one or the other of these two great hotels and attend to business and pleasure in both cities, there is an intense local feeling upon the subject, which every tourist who wishes to retain the good opinion of friends in St. Paul and Minneapolis respectively, recognizes and gracefully conforms to. No amount of real estate owned by Mrs. Greatfield in St. Paul would have shaken her allegiance to "The West." Miss Robison's exalted opinion of "The Ryan" was no less firmly held, and dangerous to be trifled with.

Entering the fine large opera house, they took a preliminary look about them. They were not at all surprised to find an interior which, for size and decorations, would be creditable to a much older and more populous city than St. Paul. The remoter the western communities, the more they

pride themselves on grand opera houses. With them the Grand Opera House stands for Luxury and Refinement, as the Church stands for Religion and the Bank for Money. Hastily surveying the crowded audience, the two friends remarked the same preponderance of evening dress, the same style of faces, the same fashionable, worldly-wise look, with which they had long been familiar in New York. The lack of anything new or peculiar in the appearance of the people before them, made the inspection devoid of interest. Meldrum and Wadlow, as they followed the usher to Miss Robison's box, could only reflect on the melancholy sameness of their prosperous fellow-citizens in all external things, no matter by how many thousands of miles they may be separated. And with that commonplace thought the audience was dismissed from their minds for the rest of the evening.

If they had differed from the majority of men—as they did not—in possessing something more than a vague knowledge of women's clothes, they would have appreciated the combined richness and good taste of the new Paris costumes worn by Mrs. Greatfield and Miss Robison expressly for the occasion. These had been the targets of lorgnettes, leveled at them point blank from all parts of the house, since they were placed on exhibition in the front seats of the box. If they excited feminine admiration, not

unmixed with envy, the chief object sought for by the wearers was gained. The widow knew how ignorant and indifferent are men of the higher and better class in matters of gowns and ornaments. Neither she nor Miss Robison expected or desired that Meldrum and Wadlow would prove exceptions to the rule, and they did not. As the door of the box was opened to them there were disclosed radiant visions of partially undraped female loveliness, which threw all the trivialities and accidents of dress into the shade.

The freedom and kindness of their reception by the ladies showed on how good a footing they had placed themselves. It also gave rise to some startling and amusing surmises among the audience, who commanded a good view of the "royal box" (as it had been termed by a newspaper reporter, in compliment to the fair owner of the house). Several reports of Mrs. Greatfield's engagement, while abroad, had got into circulation. She had contradicted these as fast as possible, but she could not catch up with them all. The presence of two strangers with the widow, in the box of her friend, started a rumor that one of them might be her imported *fiancé*. It was whispered that Meldrum was the lucky man, and that he was variously a Duke, a Marquis, or Count, of any nationality that invention might ascribe to him. As to Miss Robison, no one

was so imaginative as to suggest any tender association between her and Wadlow, which only proves how stupid is the great public, even when equipped with opera glasses, to see what is going on between two persons who are wise enough not to show it.

When the conductor rapped with his baton for the overture, there fell upon the house a hush so well bred that Meldrum and Wadlow realized more fully, than by any other sign, that they were not in New York. To be sure, the opera troupe engaged for the opening of the season was very celebrated and expensive—the prima donna commanding \$1000 a night and the first tenor almost as much—and there would be but three performances. But in spite of these cogent reasons why audiences should extract the uttermost from every note played or sung, boors and selfish persons, had they been present, would have managed to spoil the entertainment for their music-loving neighbors by their incessant chatter and giggle. St. Paul reserved its small talk for the *entr'actes*.

There were four specially attentive listeners in Miss Robison's box. While the singers were on the stage, they were not vexed and distracted by any signs of inattention in that quarter. The widow was at times sorely tempted to laugh at some absurdity of the chorus or blunders of supernumeraries. But that would have been bad form and a

bad example, and, brusque and volatile as she was, she would have bitten her lip through sooner than have annoyed other people in that way. The jelly-like quivering of her upper frame only showed the difficulty she had in holding in. Meldrum, directly behind her, was the sole person who observed it. Miss Robison and Wadlow were ostensibly wrapped up in the performance, but really in thoughts of each other. To both of them Lucia was a musical feast, familiarity with which had not lessened its deliciousness. In truth, circumstances had imparted to it new beauties, the subtle interpretation of which came from the depths of their own hearts. There is no truer expression of love and despair on the lyric stage than Donizetti's masterpiece. When two young people, who are at the beginning of a love still unavowed, drink it in with their ears and eyes, the draught is a very sweet one—even its tragic sadness dropping no bitterness in the cup. For them the story is one of constancy even unto death—and what lovers worthy of the name are frightened at that!

Between the acts there was an incessant stream of male callers at the "royal box." The hearty greetings to the ladies, on this their first public appearance since their return from Europe, testified to the popularity they enjoyed at home. Meldrum and Wadlow were introduced and received in the

cordial Western fashion,—the more cordial, perhaps, when it was discovered that they spoke the American variety of the English language. Had they proved to be Englishmen or, still worse, Frenchmen, Germans, or Italians, the young manhood of St. Paul would have felt like resenting their intrusion as undoubted aspirants for the hand of one or the other or both of the ladies. Meldrum had no personal interest in the matter save as a well-wisher of the widow. Noticing closely the fine young fellows who dropped into the box successively for a minute's talk, he detected no one with that mark of confidence and presumption in his manner which stamps the favored man. Wadlow, keenly observant on his part, was agreeably satisfied of the non-appearance of a rival. He seemed to be having the field all to himself. He did have it.

And yet for some time he could not convince himself of the undoubted fact. So accustomed are men to the frowns of fortune, so distrustful, as a rule, of their own future, that Wadlow, with all his good sense, could not readily bring himself to hope that no tremendous, almost insurmountable obstacle would thwart the progress of his love. He tormented himself by imagining some pre-engagement or old entanglement of Miss Robison which had not left her heart whole, or opposition from relatives, or the cooling effects of geographical

separation (she at St. Paul, he in New York), or (though this was the least troublesome of all his anxieties) the placement of the lady beyond his reach by virtue of her wealth, which was undoubtedly large. This last-mentioned cause of distrust vanished when squarely looked at. It is only in English and other foreign novels that suitors are ever appalled by any disparity of fortune between themselves and the objects of their idolatry. The resolute, competent young American carries a potentiality of riches in his head as surely as Napoleon's soldiers carried marshal's batons in their knapsacks. Wadlow, whatever were his momentary misgivings, had confidence in his future professional success. He expected, as a matter of course, to be rich some day. He considered no lady beyond his reach, even if it were a question solely of money-bags and not of hearts.

All the other lions in his path were as lamb-like as this, had he but known it. There was no prior affair which required the effacement of some image from the lady's heart to make room for his. There was not a single relation who would presume to advise Miss Robison in the delicate and serious matters of an engagement, except the dear old grandmother, and she was destined to become the friend and abettor of this young man the moment she set eyes on him. There was not even a guardian or

trustee to interpose with officious zeal; for Miss Robison was of age and her own mistress, and she had for adviser a lawyer of mature years, who took an instant liking to the clean-cut face of the stripling who had won, against the Nestors of the New York bar, the famous case of *The Universe Life Insurance Company vs. Rumpert, et al.* All was to go smoothly to the end, thanks to the first true love of the fair girl, whose resemblance in heart and mind to Amy Robsart was even greater than that of face and form.

If Wadlow had not, in his modesty, underrated his own power of pleasing, he would have foreseen no difficulty whatever. But how should he know at the outset—he learned it later from a dear pair of lips—that he was himself, in a small way if you please, an enchanter—that the very facility with which he surrendered to the dominion of the Masters in the Art had imparted to him a charm which one young lady, at least, found resistless. It was because she recognized the poetical, spiritual quality of the man, by which he sought to lift himself out of every-day life and its cares, into close communion with the great minds of the race, that she set him far above any man she had ever known, and made him her hero.

But that night they sat out the melodious woes of Lucia all unknowing of the fullness with which

each occupied the heart of the other. The opera's despairing close was fraught with a warning for all earthly love. It rang in their ears as they rose to leave the house, jarring almost painfully upon the feelings they had betrayed only in looks so far.

But it is the happiness of the present writer to say, all wise old saws to the contrary notwithstanding, that, as soon as love was mutually avowed between this man and this woman, and Wadlow mustered up the courage to risk all on a declaration within the next twenty-four hours, its course ran as smooth as oil and was hedged in on both sides by thornless roses.

The day after his acceptance, news came from Duluth that he need not return there for a week, to wind up the business, unexpected delays having occurred in its progress to a conclusion. This week he dedicated to the unalloyed happiness of a first love.

The sudden and romantic engagement was too choice a secret to be kept by anybody more than two days. Miss Robison had felt a shyness about allowing the fact to be proclaimed from the house-tops till she herself had become a little wonted to it. But Mrs. Greatfield was loud in her reprobation of such "nonsense." And it was to the treachery of that most devoted of friends that the young lady

owed the production of the only thrilling social sensation in which she ever took part. There were men about town who thought that the prize should have fallen into the lap of some resident of St. Paul, instead of a stranger who would bear it away to his home in New York, leaving behind him only the Grand Opera House and Robison's Block, to recall a name much respected in the short annals of the place, and most of all in the fair person of its only surviving bearer, who was to the poor of that city what Mrs. Greatfield was to the needy of Minneapolis,—a liberal, thoughtful, and constant giver. Chiefly, after all, she would be missed by the charities of her native town. But, however much her future absence might be deplored, no one who met the man of her choice, who was to carry her off in triumph, spoke aught but praise for him, so favorably did he impress everybody by his frankness, his good looks, and the heart that shone through his face. Meldrum, though second of the two in public opinion, made his friends also wherever he was introduced. And there were many people who hazarded the guess that, if Mrs. Greatfield "took anybody, it would be that other genial fellow from New York." But it was not to be. Meldrum had as little intention of marrying as the widow had. Fate, seconding their own preferences, had already irrevocably decreed that they should

both continue through life unmated to anybody; and that whatever happiness they missed for themselves, by abstinence from marriage, should not be lost to those with whom they came in contact as long as they lived. Much as may be said in behalf of wedlock as a divine institution, there is room in the world for more widows like Mrs. Josiah J. Greatfield and more bachelors like Mr. Felix Meldrum.

It was in the following January, that St. Paul saw a wedding whose brilliancy was only justly measured by the space accorded to it in the *Comet*—the list of invited guests alone filling two columns. There were several smudgy pictures of the Robison mansion and grounds, and there were portraits of the bride and groom, the benevolent intent of which did not mitigate their unparalleled atrocity as works of art.

The St. Paul public heard nothing more of the missing one,—so retired was she in her new-found happiness,—until about three months later the following item from the New York *Rostrum* was borne by the telegraph to that city and to all the world of America. Most of the night editors who received it threw it into the waste basket. Others cut it down to two or three lines. The St. Paul *Comet* printed it entire, and here it is:

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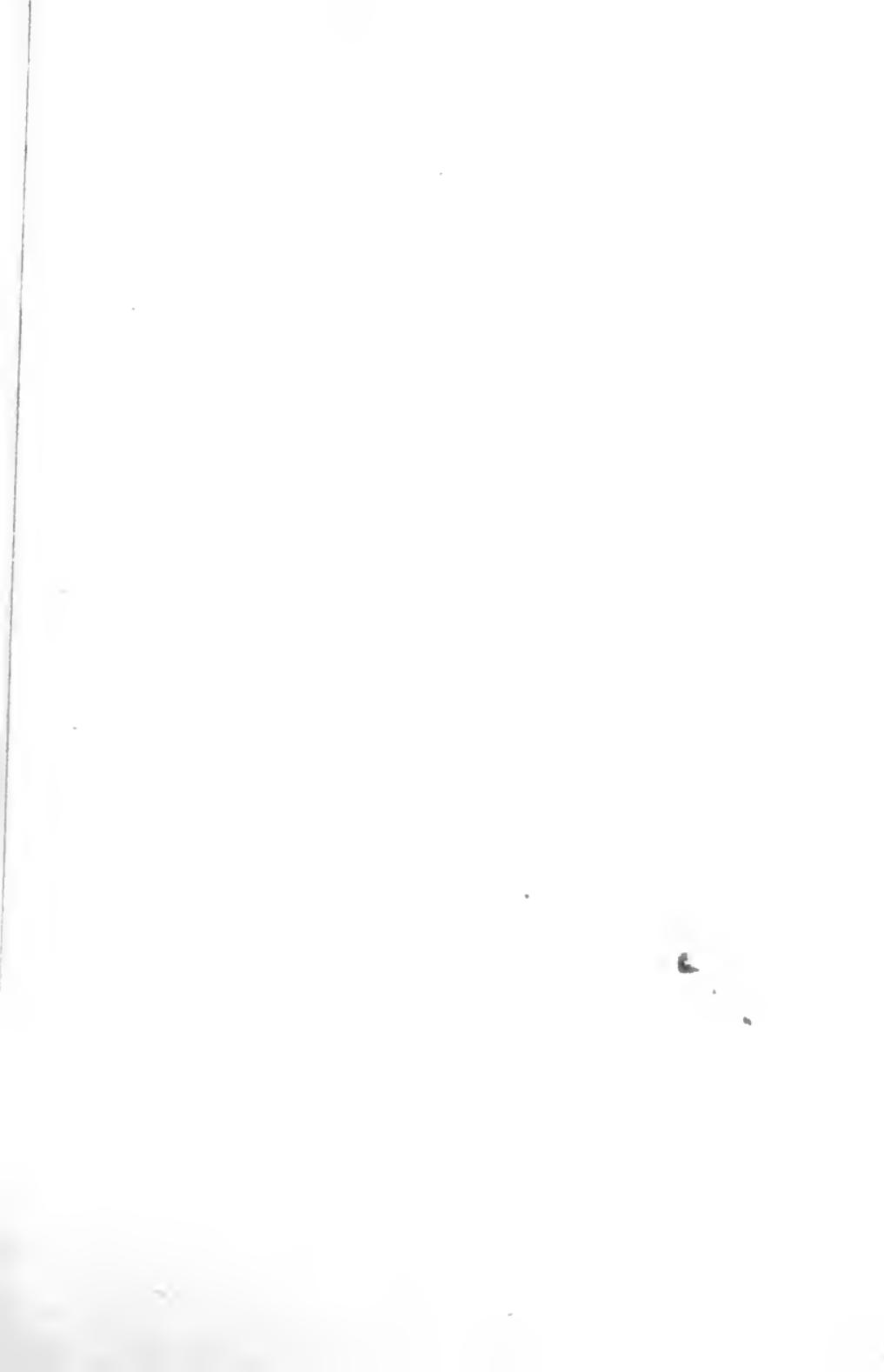
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